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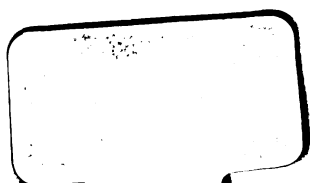
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## **A HARVEST OF WILD OATS.**

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# A HARVEST OF WILD OATS.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# A HARVEST OF WILD OATS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A BALL AT BRODHURST HALL.

**I**REDELL is leaning against one of the pillars that support the ball-room at Brodhurst Hall, criticising the points of the living picture before him. But there is no insufferable assumption of indifference in the eyes with which he surveys it. On the contrary, they are earnestly bent upon the company, especially the female portion. Iredell considers himself, and not unjustly, a fair judge of women. He has had plenty of time and opportunity for matriculating in

the art. If it cannot be said of him that his "only books" have been "woman's looks," it may at least be affirmed that they have formed no inconsiderable part of his education. For, whether with his will or against it, the women have not been in the habit of leaving Iredell to study alone.

They have been too ready to follow him into the very recesses of his intellectual sanctum, these fair items of moral literature, and there to display their open pages for his perusal, without giving him so much as the trouble to turn over the leaf for himself. In fact, Iredell has been as much spoilt by the sex, as it is possible for weakness and vanity and greed to spoil a really strong and noble nature, whose worst faults are too great leniency and tenderness towards the lovely locusts that have preyed upon him.

As he leans against the pillar, conspicuously taller by a couple of inches than

any other man in the room, it is not difficult to understand the reason why he should have been thus sought after. The very eyes with which he gravely but fearlessly contemplates the figure of each woman that passes him, and which seldom fail to call forth a responsive glance, tell the tale. Beautiful eyes they are : almost too beautiful to be set in the head of a man—that is to say, they would be too beautiful, were not their grey-blue, dark-lashed languor, redeemed by an occasional flash of the most saucy, impudent, wicked lightning that ever illuminated the depths of a human soul. His well-shaped head, covered with close-shorn hair, makes one speculate how Samson's long ringlets could ever have been cited in proof of the strength of manhood, or Absalom's frizzly chevelure been considered a type of beauty ; his muscular limbs rather detract from than add to his extraordinary height ; his finely-cut nostrils

and handsome hands and feet denote the pure blood from which he has sprung, whilst his mouth, with its sensitive lips so constantly parted to show the pure firm teeth behind them, would be pronounced too yielding in its character, except for the iron jaw and chin which it surmounts.

For all his good looks, Iredell is evidently no "ladies' man" in the general acceptation of the term. On the contrary, he is as perfect a type, perhaps, of what one of his sex should be, as may be found in this degenerate world, and he would not be so flattered and fawned upon by his fair companions were he any less manly and muscular and (when he chooses to exert his power) resolutely determined than he is. Few women love by choice an effeminate man. The love of him may be forced upon them, but as a rule, though their sympathies may be excited for the weak, their admiration goes with the strong. Iredell has

evoked this tribute from them from the hour he was old enough to attract their attention, and they have never suffered him to forget it. They have fostered and fed his vanity with the sweetest of compliments and the most approving of glances, until he would sadly miss their adulation were it withdrawn. His manner bears no trace of personal conceit however; what we accept as a right we cease to be conceited of. If we have been used to be well nourished every day, we take our meals as ordinary occurrences; we can expect our dinner without feeling greedy over it, but were it postponed for a few hours, or for an indefinite period, we should miss it sorely and chafe over the unusual loss.

So is it with Iredell. He is not so odious as to imagine that every woman that looks at him must needs admire him; this would be to degrade him to the level of a fop or coxcomb, but he has been so little



used to rebuffs from the sex, that he regards them, in the mass, as a pleasant, amiable company, always ready to do him and his fellows—for Iredell has never imagined that he stands alone in this particular—homage by means of their sweet looks and words, and sweeter actions.

And it is the women who have brought him to it. As we first see him, he is employed in drawing on a pair of gloves. The ball has reached its meridian; the supper rooms were thrown open an hour ago; Iredell has but just returned, after many heavy rounds of duty, from a little light skirmishing in that direction on his own account. This is the first county ball he has attended, or rather it is the first ball which he has attended in this particular county of Brambleshire, and the faces of the company are new to him. He is therefore enabled to criticise them all the more ably as they file round the room with their

partners at the conclusion of the first after-supper dance.

"Going in for it again, Iredell?" demands a heavy young swell, who considers, for his own part, that to indulge the female creation with more than two or three rounds in the course of the evening would be to ruin their peace of mind for many consecutive days after they had lost sight of him again.

"I should think I was," replies Iredell, with the enthusiasm of eighteen in his laughter-loving eyes. "I am only waiting to decide whom I shall ask. Which are the best dancers here, Clayton?"

"Well, I can hardly tell you; I've tried so few of them. Country girls don't dance well as a rule. They haven't enough practice."

"I don't know that. I have taken out two or three to-night that would not have disgraced a garrison town. That's a pretty girl opposite—with the dark eyes."

"Emmy Stewart. She's the daughter of the parson here—awfully fast girl. I'll introduce you if you like."

"Do," replies Iredell, curtly, as he follows Clayton across the room.

His evident approach to their quarters causes much commotion in the group of young ladies, amongst which Miss Stewart is seated.

"O! I say, Emmy, that tall, good-looking fellow is coming over here. I wonder if he is going to ask either of us to dance?"

"Why shouldn't he? I saw him watching me as I was waltzing with Charlie Denham."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. I daresay he is staying in the house. I never saw him before. But the Hall is full of guests."

"On account of this coming marriage, I suppose. Have you seen the bridegroom elect?"

"No. I've asked several people to point him out to me, but they were strangers here, like myself; and I don't know Lady Brodhurst well enough to speak of it to her."

"That seems funny, when your father is the clergyman of the village."

"Well, you know, the family never even visited Brodhurst Hall within my recollection until after Sir Walter's death, and since then they have only been here at long intervals and for a short time, and kept entirely to themselves. And papa says the only reason this ball is given here is because the Hall will belong to Miss Brodhurst by-and-by, and he supposes they think they ought to show some civility to the county people before her marriage. But that even is to take place in London."

"He is in the army, isn't he?"

"Yes. That is why there are so many of the military here this evening. I like

the military in a ball-room—don't you?—they always dance so well.”

By this time Iredell and Clayton have made their way through the crush of tarl-tane petticoats and bare shoulders, and are standing meekly before Miss Stewart.

There is a number of people chattering round and about the sofa, and all that she has distinguished of Mr. Clayton's address is, “Stewart — pleasure—'duce—friend — Colonel—'dell——” when the poor little man's view of her is summarily intercepted by the body of a stout female; and he is to be seen making signals of distress, as he is borne away by the crowd.

But Miss Stewart cares very little for Mr. Clayton's discomfiture. Over the head of the stout female she can discern the handsome, half-saucy, half-serious face of Colonel Iredell, as he waits with comic patience till he can wade to her feet; and establishes a telegraphic communication

with her by means of his eyes, even before he has had the opportunity of opening his mouth in her presence.

She has scarcely replied, with eager alacrity, in the affirmative to the question which she guesses at, more than hears issuing from his lips, when he has his arm round her waist, and is skilfully steering her to the other end of the room. As they pause for a few seconds' breathing space, the first words which the little woman addresses to him come in the shape of flattery.

"How splendidly you dance!"

"I may return the compliment! This is an excellent room for dancing in."

"But too crowded—don't you think so? I have been so bumped about this evening, I felt quite afraid of venturing on another round dance. But you steer admirably, and——"

"And—what? May I not hear the rest?"

"You are so—so—*big*. I feel quite safe with you."

"You make me rejoice in my 'bigness' for the first time in my life. It has generally been more in my way than otherwise. I think you are ready for another start."

"Wait a minute. Do you see that girl in a high white silk dress, talking to the old man in the corner?"

"I do."

"That's Miss Brodhurst, who is going to be married next month. But perhaps you know her?"

"Yes. I am staying at the Hall."

"How stupid of me. I might have guessed as much. You know the fiancé too, then, of course?"

"I have seen him."

"What is he like, Colonel Dale? Is he tall?"

"Tol-lol."

"Fair or dark?"

“Medium, I should say.”

“Good looking?”

“Well, that is quite a matter of opinion.”

“O! you need say no more. I’m sure he’s a wretch. I hate your men that are neither one thing or the other: fair nor dark; short nor tall; handsome nor ugly. I like a man to *be* a man, don’t you?”

“Well, I must confess I have never heard anything to the contrary with regard to Miss Brodhurst’s choice; but you will have an opportunity, I have no doubt, of judging for yourself some day.”

“Will you point him out to me?”

“If we come across him—yes.”

They take another turn after this, during which they more than once encounter Clare Brodhurst, standing quietly by the side of her mother, or talking to some of their guests.

“Miss Brodhurst does not appear to be dancing much,” says Emmy Stewart, fanning



herself violently as she halts with her partner for the second time. "But I should not think she cared about it."

"Why not?" asks Iredell, as he looks down upon her, with an amused expression in his face,

"O! because—well, I don't quite know, but she looks so quiet and demure, as if she thought dancing and all that sort of thing frivolity. I'm sure she wouldn't flirt to save her life."

"I don't think she would."

"Do you like her then?" with an upward glance that seemed to deprecate an answer in the affirmative.

"What do you call *liking*?"

"Is she nice? Do you think she is warm-hearted? She seems so stiff and prim to me; but then, I dare say, I'm no judge. Mamma says I'm much too much the other way myself."

"Well, 'the other way' is a very

pleasant way, whatever mamma may think of it."

Emmy Stewart laughs, and picks the marabout trimming from her fan.

"I'm not so open with *everyone*, you know. But somehow I can talk to you. You haven't told me yet what you think of Miss Brodhurst."

"Suppose we leave Miss Brodhurst alone for the present, and think of ourselves. Are you ready to dance again?"

"I wish I could get a little cool first. I am so awfully warm."

"Come into the balcony for a while, that will cool you."

"I should like it immensely, only mamma would be sure to make a fuss about it, and fancy I was taking cold. She is watching me at this moment, I can see."

"Let us go into the conservatory then. There are no windows open there, and if there are, I will close them."

"Cannot we reach it through the supper rooms?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go that way then, and mamma will think we are going in to supper again."

"I am at your commands, madam," says Iredell, as he places her hand through his arm, and conducts her from the ball-room by the direction she has intimated. In a few minutes they find themselves, by a circuitous route, in the dimly-lighted conservatory that adjoins on the ball-room. No other dancers have invaded its precincts: Iredell and his partner find themselves there alone.

"How lucky!" he exclaims, as he places the girl upon a seat, and throws himself beside her. Miss Stewart knows perfectly well to what he alludes in calling himself "lucky," but she is too able a flirt to allow it to pass unnoticed.

"*What* is lucky?" she demands, with apparent innocence.

"That we should get the conservatory to ourselves. Is it not better than being in a crowd?" he answers, looking down upon his companion.

She is certainly a very pretty little woman, with soft black eyes, and a gipsy complexion, and a fascinating dimple in her cheek, that appears at the most dangerous moments—just when it should not, in fact—and keeps time with a certain wicked expression in her eyes.

"Well! that depends, Colonel Dale. I do not suppose it can make much difference to you and me. By the way, do tell me your name."

"Frank——"

"Is it? How nice! I never knew a Frank that I couldn't make friends with. But I meant your surname."

"Have you not just called me by it?"

"O! I'm right then. I thought I might not have heard it correctly. It is so difficult to catch a name on a first introduction. And you are in the army—what regiment?"

"I belong to the Artillery."

"And where are you stationed? Do tell me all about yourself. Are you an Irishman?"

"No, indeed! What makes you think so? Have you distinguished a brogue in my voice?"

"What nonsense! Of course I have not. I think it is your having blue eyes and dark hair that made me ask the question."

"You have done my eyes too much honour by finding out that they *are* blue. I've known them for thirty-five years without arriving at the truth."

"You're not thirty-five!"

"I am, upon my honour."

"I should never have taken you for more than thirty."

"Don't you see the white hairs in my head?"

Emmy Stewart laughs, and says it would take better eyes than hers to see them.

"Look then," replies Iredell, bending down his handsome head for her inspection. She pushes it away, tittering.

"Now, do be serious, Colonel Dale. If you are not an Irishman, what are you?"

"A Cornishman! At least, my mother assured me I was so."

"How *can* you?" exclaims Miss Stewart, convulsed at the insinuation. "You remind me of a story—but no! I cannot tell it you. It is too improper."

"Nothing is improper in this world," says Iredell, getting a little closer to her.

"That is *your* creed, is it? I suppose you never consider anything you do yourself improper?"

"Certainly not! I have never thought, nor said, nor done anything that I consider improper since I was born. It's all talk, you know. The world sets up a certain standard for itself, and falls down and worships it. For instance, society permits a man to put his arm round a woman's waist whilst he is dancing with her; but directly they are alone together, when it would be much more pleasurable, society dubs the selfsame act improper. Yet, where's the difference?"

"I'm sure I don't know," says Miss Stewart, looking down and biting her lip.

"I had my arm round your waist a moment ago," continues Iredell, insinuatingly, "and you didn't mind it. Why should you mind it now? What is there improper in it?"

"O! because people talk so."

"Exactly; but there's no one to talk at present," continues her companion, as he

slips his arm quietly around her. "Now tell the truth, isn't that much more comfortable?"

"O! Colonel Dale—you shouldn't—really."

"I will take it away directly, if you tell me."

"Well, I know I *ought* to tell you—but—but——"

"But—you wont. There's a dear girl. So now we can sit cosily here for a few minutes and enjoy a quiet chat. I have answered all the questions you have put to me. I want to hear everything you will tell me about yourself."







## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE CONSERVATORY.

**A**LREADY I feel that I am blushing for my hero, and the position he has placed himself in. But to prevent all mistakes for the future, let me premise that he is, what women term, "a regular rascal;" though, be it understood, they connect no idea of rascality in its real sense with the accusation, which they consider rather a compliment than otherwise. But there are two lights by which men regard women in this world, and there is a different class of men for each light. One class looks upon them as they look upon their fellow-men: as strangers, distinct from their interests and themselves, and,

except in the extreme cases of mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, as creatures with whom they have neither more nor less affinity than with their own sex.

Such men give women their generic nomenclature. They do not speak of the community as "women," but as "ladies," or "servants," or by whatever status they may happen to occupy. There is no freemasonry between them, and they are not the men to whom the women turn in distress, or fear, or weakness, confident that simply because they *are men* they will be ready to help or defend them.

The other class, naturally, is just the reverse of this. To these men, woman appears as a mass, a community ; a creation formed for themselves, and from which each member has a right to claim their sympathy and assistance. Such men select and have their own particular women from the crowd, but becoming the sole possessor of one does

not necessarily separate their interests from the herd, which in the aggregate was made for their pleasure and dependent on themselves. To such men it is very hard to resist the temptation to make themselves agreeable to anything that comes in female form, whether it be high-born or low-born, ugly or beautiful, old or young. And so completely do they regard the whole feminine creation as a species of personal property, that a glance of admiration, or a pressure of the hand, comes as naturally to them as the most fitting tribute they can pay the sex, as a formal salutation comes to the other. It is needless to say that Iredell belongs to the latter class. It is his pride to remember that no woman has ever extended to him the least encouragement that he has not been quick to accept. No thrilling look has ever passed unresponded to by Iredell; no delicate hand has ever quivered in his own without receiving a

reassuring pressure; no invitation been accorded, whether for greater or lesser things, but what has been joyfully and readily acceded to. And as yet, notwithstanding his five-and-thirty years, there is no indication of his ardour cooling down.

Woman is his weakness; and though he no longer goes forth to seek her as of old, he is quite unfit to cope with her wiles when she comes after him. And Miss Emmy Stewart, with her piquant gipsy face, and her very faint resistance to his arm about her waist, is becoming too much for the prudence and excellent resolutions (for he really has been making excellent resolutions of late) of Francis Iredell.

"What am I to tell you?" says the girl, as she leans back against the strong arm thrown round her.

"First, where do you live?"

"Well, papa and mamma live here, you

know. Papa is clergyman of the parish, so of course this is my home; but I am generally with my aunt in London. I wish you lived in London."

"I do—very nearly. I am quartered at Woolwich, and am in town almost every afternoon."

"Perhaps we may meet then."

"I sincerely trust so. What is your aunt's name and address?"

"Mrs. Ormerod—15, Manchester Square. How soon do you go back to Woolwich?"

"To-morrow."

"And I return to London the day after."

"May I call on you there?"

"If you'll be sure and say you're a very old friend of papa's; because Aunt Fanny might ask questions else."

"O! I'll be an old friend of anybody you like, so long as it gives me an opportunity of seeing you again."

"O, Colonel Dale! . How can you?"

"How can I, what?"

"Pretend you like me!"

"But I *do* like you. I only wish you liked me half so much."

"I shan't say anything, or else you'll grow conceited. Hush! I'm sure I heard footsteps. Do take your arm away."

"Bother it! I hope nobody is coming in here," says Iredell.

"They're sure to find out the conservatory sooner or later; we must make up our minds to that."

"Can't we go somewhere else? Would you be afraid of the balcony now? I will fetch you a shawl from the ladies' dressing-room."

"I don't think it would hurt me. I am quite cool again. Feel!" she says, extending a rounded arm for his edification.

He touches it lightly with his gloved hand.

"You appear to be so."

"You humbug! How can you tell through your glove?"

"Well, then, I will feel it without my glove," he answers, coolly, as he bends his lips upon the dimpled arm, keeping his eyes fixed the while upon her face.

Even as Iredell commits this imprudence, he knows it is not "the thing to do." Yet, as he tells his self-accusing conscience afterwards, what mortal man could have resisted an invitation so frankly extended? But as his lips touch the cool, firm flesh, he sees Miss Stewart's expression of gratified vanity change to one of alarm.

"O, Colonel Dale! pray don't!" she exclaims, hurriedly, as she draws her arm away.

"What is the matter?"

"Hush! some one is coming." And she has scarcely withdrawn herself from his close proximity before Lady Brodhurst stands before them.

"Colonel Iredell!" she says, glowering, "is this really you? And Miss Stewart, too. Your mamma was inquiring where you were, Miss Stewart, at least half an hour ago. She must think that you are lost."

"I had better go to her at once," replies Emmy, with some trepidation, as she attempts to rise.

"Not at all," says Iredell. "*I* will take you back to Mrs. Stewart when you are ready to go."

He is not a man to be ordered about nor browbeaten by any dragon. . He resents the tone Lady Brodhurst has adopted exceedingly. He owes a certain duty to the trembling girl by his side, and he means to do it.

"I must, at all events, request *you* to return to the ball-room, Colonel Iredell. Clare is waiting to speak to you."

"I shall be at Miss Brodhurst's service



in a few minutes; as soon, in fact, as I have had the pleasure of conducting Miss Stewart back to her *châperon*."

"I did not know young ladies were so particular about their *châperons* nowadays," remarks Lady Brodhurst, in a still more disagreeable tone. "However, I have no control over your actions, Colonel Iredell, of course."

"O! pray, Colonel Dale," says Emmy—who in her confusion and distress has not noticed the different name by which her hostess addresses him—"let us return at once. I should be so sorry to keep Miss Brodhurst waiting a moment for you."

"I will undertake to make my peace with Miss Brodhurst, who would be the first person to resent such an act of rudeness on my part, as leaving you at this moment would be. Perhaps, Lady Brodhurst," he continues, as he rises and places

Miss Stewart's hand upon his arm, "you will be kind enough to take that message to Clare, and say that I will be with her presently? Not that I believe she ever sent it," he remarks sotto voce to Emmy, as he walks out of the conservatory with her by the door leading to the supper-room, leaving Lady Brodhurst in a state of the highest indignation at what she is pleased to term his "audacity."

"O! Colonel Dale, do you think she saw?" exclaims his fair companion, as soon as they are beyond earshot.

"Saw what?"

"*You* know—what you were doing, I mean. O! I wish you hadn't."

"*I* don't. I should like to do it again."

"Do be serious. Will there be a fuss about it?"

"With Lady Brodhurst? I should think not. I don't believe she even saw it; but, if so, what matter. We are not under *her*

commands, are we? *You* are the sole person who has a right to be offended. Are you?"

"O! Colonel Dale, I wont tell you—I wont indeed. It was awfully wrong, you know, and you must never do it again."

"I wont—till next time. And now, what may I get you to drink? You must have a glass of wine. You are looking quite scared from the Brodhurst assault."

"It was enough to scare any one. I am so afraid she'll tell mamma. Sherry, please! I shall be all in a tremble till I get back again."

"We will go at once then, and forestal any garbled accounts of our indiscretion. But I hope this is not the last time we shall discuss it together. We must have a laugh over Lady Brodhurst's dismay in London."

"I shall see you in London, then?" says Emmy, timidly. She quite thinks she

has captivated this splendid-looking Colonel, with the grey-blue eyes.

“Without doubt—on the very first opportunity,” replies Iredell, as they reach the dowagers’ corner; and he deposits her, with a bow, by the side of her mother.

The ball is nearly over now; a few dilapidated couples are trying to be brisk over Sir Roger de Coverley, and most of the remaining guests are standing preparatory to a move. Iredell returns to the supper-room, and there remains *perdu*, until all the cloaking and shawling has been accomplished, when he reappears in search of Clare Brodhurst. He finds her alone, waiting for him in an ante-chamber, where they are used to exchange “good night” with one another.

“My darling!” he exclaims, rapturously, as he walks straight up to her side.

Clare flushes all over like the heart of a rose. She is a tall, slight girl, who looks

eminently graceful and aristocratic in the creamy silk dress, that is made high up to her white throat, and down to her slender wrists. Her nutbrown hair is coiled low upon the nape of her neck, and her earnest, violet eyes very rarely flash with the lightning with which those of Miss Emmy Stewart are so familiar; which is perhaps the reason why the latter young lady thinks she looks cold and reserved. But those who know Clare Brodhurst best know what a well of deep feeling lies beneath her quiet glance and dignified manner; and none know it better than Francis Iredell.

“Have you been waiting for me, Clare? Did you think I was lost?”

He takes her in his arms as he speaks, and regularly enfolds her in his strong grasp. And she leans her head upon his shoulder, and feels blissfully content.

“No, dear Frank! What makes you think so?”

“Because your mother pursued me into the conservatory, where I was in the midst of a most outrageous flirtation with a pretty little girl, called Emmy Stewart, and said you wanted to speak to me.”

Clare laughs quietly, with her face pressed against his. Her laugh is like rippling water, it is so soft and musical to listen to; and it parts the very sweetest and purest of lips, which Iredell looks down upon fondly, and closes with his own.

“Mamma must have been mistaken, Frank. And so she interrupted you in the midst of your sweet speeches to Miss Stewart, did she? Poor darling, injured boy! How you must have hated her.”

“It was just as well she did, Sweetheart. I really was going at an awful pace, and don’t know where I might not have ended if Lady Brodhurst had not opportunely come in. But her dismay at the position

was comical. She is sure to tell you all about it by-and-by. How my poor ears will burn whilst the usual colloquy is going on in her dressing-room to-night."

"They will not burn long, Frank," says Clare, drawing herself up. "No one, not even mamma, ever dares to say a second sentence in disparagement of you to me. I have too much respect for myself and for you to permit it."

"You dear, dearest of women!" exclaims Iredell, as he smothers her in kisses. "I don't believe there ever was nor ever will be such a perfect specimen of her sex as you are."

"Silly boy!" says Clare, lovingly, as she draws a full long sigh of complete happiness.

"But I really am an awful flirt."

"Whoever doubted it, Frank?"

"But this evening I have been worse than usual; I don't know how it was. I

suppose the little gipsy drew me on ; but I actually went so far as——”

“Frank dear, stop!” says Clare. “I don’t want to know what passed between Miss Stewart and you. It is no concern of mine, and I do not think you have any right to repeat it. What *does* concern me is this : that I trust you, as I love you, from the bottom of my heart, and believe that whatever you do is best. If I have perfect faith in your love for me, I must have perfect faith in your actions, because I know that even if you wrong yourself you will not wrong *me*.”

Iredell hangs his head, abashed.

“Clare, I am not worthy of such love ! Don’t place me on too high a pedestal, lest some day I come toppling down, and prove myself to be but common clay.”

“That would only make me believe that no mortals are cast in a better mould. I



could not be going to do—what I am—if I did not trust you to the very end.”

Iredell has covered his face with his hands.

“God make me worthy of your trust!” he says solemnly; and then with the most comical expression of perplexity on his face, he rushes from the sublime to the ridiculous by adding—“But I do wish He wouldn’t send so many pretty women into the world and throw them all in my way.”

“I’ll steer you through all right,” says Clare, confidently.

“I believe you will. I believe you have come to be the angel of my life, and to rivet all my thoughts and hopes upon one woman alone.”

“Ah! that would be too much to expect of such a spoilt child,” returns Clare, with her quiet laugh.

A servant puts his head in at the door.

“Her ladyship is asking for you, Miss ;

her ladyship has gone up to her own room."

"Very good. Say I will join her directly."

"My poor character!" exclaims Iredell, pathetically. "I'd rather a thousand times *you* had come in than your mother, Clare."

"No, don't say that. It would have been much more awkward for poor Miss Stewart. And now I must bid you good night, Frank, for mamma does not like being kept waiting."

"Good night, my own darling!"

He embraces her as her future husband has a right to embrace her, and she returns his kisses freely. There is no prudery about Clare Brodhurst. She is a true woman from crown to sole.

Even as she crosses the threshold she turns her head, and seeing Iredell's handsome face clouded by the remembrance o

his iniquity, flies back to him and clasps both her arms about his neck.

“I love you, Frank!—I *love* you!” she says, earnestly. “Never forget that!” and before he has time to answer she is gone.





### CHAPTER III.

#### IREDELL'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.

**L**ADY BRODHURST is sitting before the fire in her dressing-room (it is still early spring), awaiting her daughter's advent in a most perturbed and uneasy condition.

"Not undressed yet, mamma dear?" exclaims Clare as she enters the room. "You will be so tired to-morrow. Where is Collins?"

"I have sent her away, my dear. I cannot rest until I have spoken to you upon a subject of the utmost importance, and to which I have no desire Collins should be a listener. Are all the company gone?"

"All, mamma. The last carriage-full went off twenty minutes ago. What a successful evening it has been, hasn't it? Every one appeared so well pleased, and dear Frank has been *so* good—dancing with every girl in the room," says Clare, with an idea of meeting any attack which may be made on the behaviour of Colonel Iredell half way.

"Well, I don't know what you call 'good,' Clare. It is on the very subject of Colonel Iredell's conduct that I wish to speak to you."

"Why, mamma, you are actually trembling! What can possibly have occurred to affect you like this?"

"And isn't it enough to make a woman tremble to find that the happiness of her only child is being trifled with, as though it were of no value at all?"

"I don't understand you, mamma!" replies Clare, with dignity. "If you mean to

insinuate that Frank is trifling with *my* happiness you are perfectly mistaken."

"It is you who are mistaken, child, not I. You little know of what that man is capable. It is shameful for me to have to repeat it to you, but I caught him this evening kissing that little upstart, Emmeline Stewart, in the conservatory; and if *you* consider that a proper thing for the man who is engaged to marry you to do, *I* do not."

And Lady Brodhurst turns again towards the fire, and taps the floor impatiently with her foot. Clare is standing opposite to her mother, leaning on the back of a chair. As she hears the recital of Francis Iredell's indiscretion, her sweet face turns a shade paler with vexation. She had forbid the confession when he offered to make it to her himself; but somehow she had not imagined it had gone quite as far as this, and it is harder to hear it from

Lady Brodhurst's mouth than it would have been from his. So she bites her lip nervously, and cannot for the moment trust herself to answer.

"I see I have surprised you, my poor child," resumes her mother after a pause, "but it is right you should know the worst."

"You have not surprised me, mamma. Frank has told me of his flirtation with Miss Stewart, and your interruption of it, already."

"What! He has the audacity not only to do such things, but to go and boast of them to you afterwards. This beats everything."

"He did not boast of it. He seemed sorry it should have occurred."

"And you forgave him, of course!"

"I did not think there was anything to forgive. Whatever he may have done, it was but the indiscretion of the moment.

You know, mother, his heart is solely and entirely mine."

"Clare, you are perfectly infatuated with that man."

"Well, if so it is a pardonable weakness, considering we are to be married in three weeks."

"I believe you would marry him if he had thirteen wives already."

"If it were possible—*yes!* But what is the reason of your offence, mamma? Did you imagine that the fact of his having kissed Miss Stewart would make me break off my engagement with Colonel Iredell?"

"If you had any pride in yourself it would."

"*O, mother!*"

There is a world of meaning in the tone in which Clare utters those two words; but Lady Brodhurst is unable to read it.

"Everybody told you what this man was," she goes on, rapidly. "From the



hour he was introduced to us you cannot say you have been unaware of the character he bears, and has borne for the last ten years. You know that if he has been concerned in one scrape with women, he has in a dozen: that he has a name for trifling and flirtation throughout the country, and is as well known in every garrison town in England as the regiment itself. He is about as little likely to make a good husband as any one you have seen; and yet, in spite of all this, you chose to accept his offer of marriage, and to run the risk of making yourself miserable for life. And *you*—my only child, too—who might have every luxury in the world at your command. It is incomprehensible to me!"

"Perhaps it is, mamma, because you don't love him. That makes all the difference. But let us talk this matter over quietly. Oh, don't cry, dear mother! You

break my heart when you cry. And, in my turn, I must say it is utterly incomprehensible to me that any one should cry on my account."

She has been standing all this time, but now Clare throws herself down on the hearthrug at her mother's feet, and winds her arm caressingly about her.

"Dearest mamma! I know all you say is true. It must seem strange to any one that I—your only child—and a child who has so much to be grateful to you for in twenty long years of love and care and solicitude"—here the girl's voice breaks, and she has to wait a moment before she can go on—"should be so ready to give it all up for a man whom she has only known a few months. It seems hard and unnatural and selfish; but God knows I do not feel so. I could not do it for any one but Frank, whom I love as——"

"Ah! that is the question, my child!

*Do you really love him? Think how terrible it would be to find out afterwards that you were mistaken."*

"I don't know if it is real love I feel for him," replies the girl, simply; "but it fills my soul. You say, dear mother, that I knew from the beginning that he bore the character of being a flirt. It is true. I did know it; and had I not, Frank has freely confessed it to me since, and in the face of this I promised him my hand. Have I any right to withdraw that promise now, even if I had the inclination?"

"But, my dear, consider! Is it justifiable—is it decent—is it respectful to you, and your engagement with himself, that Colonel Iredell should waste his foolish speeches and compliments and kisses upon every girl who comes in his way?"

"*Did* he kiss her, mamma? Did you see him?"

“ Well, Clare, I discovered him with her hand clasped in his, and bending over her in a manner which left little doubt of what he was doing.”

Clare gives the faintest of regretful sighs. She would not have her mother hear it for the world.

“ Let us suppose he did then. I am sorry for it, mother ; I wont deny that. I think it is foolish and frivolous of Frank not to be able to withstand the blandishments of a pretty girl ; but, when all is said and done, a kiss is not a mortal sin ; and he came to me and spoke of it so openly that I could not but pass it over, knowing how much he loves me the while.”

“ He has a strange way of showing his love for you, I must say,” remarks Lady Brodhurst, not half satisfied ; “ and you are, without exception, the most lenient woman in love I ever met, Clare. You

will utterly spoil Colonel Iredell if you marry him, and he is just the sort of man to take advantage of your indulgence."

The prospect does not appear to frighten Clare. She smiles into the fire with a happy, hopeful smile.

"Frank and I quite understand each other on this subject. Where there is complete confidence there cannot be much danger. Make yourself easy about my future, dear mamma. My husband may *flirt*—indeed, I don't believe or expect that he will ever be cured of that weakness; but if *I* don't object to it no one else has a right to do so. And do you suppose I have not more faith in myself and him than to be afraid of the rivalry of an insignificant girl like this parson's daughter?" continues Clare, with proud stateliness. "I only think it was most condescending of Frank to take any notice of her."

"If you look on it in that light, of

course there's nothing more to be said," replies Lady Brodhurst; "but I hardly expected you to take my words as referring to Miss Stewart alone. The experience of to-night is only a specimen of what you may expect through life. It is not the first time such little unpleasantnesses have occurred since your engagement to Colonel Iredell, and it will not be the last, you may take my word for it."

"I am quite prepared for all contingencies," says Clare, rising. "And now, mamma dear, I really think you had better let me ring the bell for Collins to undress you. We are both tired, and shall do no good by discussing the subject further. In a very few weeks I shall be Frank's wife, and then——"

"Then the world will combine to hide all these things from you, Clare. Husbands and wives are always the last to hear the scandals that affect them most."

“All the better for me, mamma! I never wish to hear any scandal about my Frank, I can tell you. I mean to take him as he is, and all the consequences into the bargain.” And out of the room goes Clare, with a confident smile on her lips that leaves Lady Brodhurst in doubt as to whether she really feels her lover’s defection, or is as blissfully indifferent to it as she would lead her to suppose.

But bravely as she has borne up before her mother, Clare finds it difficult to maintain such perfect equanimity when alone. There is nothing more bitter to a woman than to have a doubt infused into her mind respecting the man she loves. Love and reason are such equal powers, and the fight between them is so strong, though, thank God for the poor world’s sake, love generally wins the day. Clare knows that Frank Iredell has been a terrible flirt; she has said it to herself

over and over again, and smiled at the idea of its ever causing her a heartache; and she has told him, as she told him to-night, that he may philander to his heart's content, and she shall never trouble him with so much as a question on the subject. Nor does she ever intend so to do, only mamma's scruples and doubts and dismal forebodings have left an unpleasant feeling on her mind. Suppose, after all, Lady Brodhurst be right, and Frank's conduct be incompatible with love for herself?

No, Clare cannot believe it. She will believe anything but that. She finds a thousand excuses for her lover's conduct as a true woman always will. A man's education and bringing up are so different from that of the other sex. It is impossible to judge them by the same tests. And, after all, what should mamma know of the temptations dear Frank has been sub-



jected to. Of course, he has been spoilt and flattered; who could resist spoiling him when he looked into her face with those sweet saucy eyes of his, or refuse to give him anything he asked for? Clare is so much in love with this man, that she must needs believe that the whole world is envying her the possession of him, and, as in the case of all valuable property, thieves will be found anxious to wrest him from her arms.

But Frank wont go, she is well assured of that. He may trifle and talk nonsense with these harpies of girls who hang upon his words and looks, and consider him the finest man they have ever seen ("as well they may," thinks Clare, with a proud swell of the bosom), but it will end there. They must rest content with his smiles—and perhaps here and there his kisses—what are kisses, after all,

but nonsense, when unaccompanied by any deeper feeling—but his heart will ever be her own, and hers only; and Clare is content with that. Still—still—there is just the least bit of a cloud on her face the next morning as she meets him at breakfast—a mere shade, but Iredell's eyes are quick enough to detect it, and guess to whose influence it is due; and as soon as the meal is over he follows her out of the room into the privacy of her own boudoir.





## CHAPTER IV.

### CLARE HEARS HIS CONFESSION.

**C**LARE," he says, earnestly, "is anything the matter? What is the reason you are so silent this morning? You are not angry with me surely about that silly affair of last night, and after the sweet way in which you refused to receive my confession too? What did Lady Brodhurst say to you on the subject?"

"Well, she was vexed, Frank, naturally, at having come upon you and Miss Stewart in the conservatory; she looked upon it as a slight to me. But it's not that really that makes me feel a little serious to-day. I don't care a pin about it, and I told mamma so plainly."

"Then what *do* you care about, my Clare?"

"Nothing—nothing—when we are together," she murmurs.

The result of her maiden meditation was, that she intended holding a very serious conversation with Colonel Iredell, and asking him to sound his own heart, and tell her frankly whether he really was prepared to give up all other women thenceforward for her sake. But as her eyes meet his, and she reads the deep affection that illumines their depths, she does what many another foolish soft woman has done before her—forgets everything excepting that she loves him, and he is hers.

"Your mother said, or insinuated something, to vex you, Clare, I am certain of that. Come, tell me everything, my child. Remember how soon our interests are to be made one for ever."

"It seems so silly even to think of it

now," answers the girl. "But, Frank darling, you are sure, *quite* sure, are you not, that you will never care again for any woman but me?"

Iredell's face becomes overshadowed.

"This is more serious than I thought it was. It is cruel of Lady Brodhurst to infuse any such doubt into your mind about me."

"O, *I don't* doubt you, Frank! I cannot, will not doubt you. Only, as you said yourself, there are so many pretty women in the world, and I am only one amongst the many."

"*Only one!*" he repeats, reproachfully, "and you think such an one will not be enough for me. Well, perhaps I deserve it. My character may be too frivolous and unstable to earn the respect of a true, pure woman, like yourself; yet Clare, if you could read my heart you would see how entirely it is devoted to you. All the

rest is nonsense, darling—mere bubbles on the surface; but I am ashamed to think that I should have allowed the exhibition of my folly to disturb you for a moment, or to bring me within the range of Lady Brodhurst's censure."

"And I am ashamed to think I ever mentioned it again to you. O! Frank, forgive me; I am not jealous, indeed—I never was so—but when mamma talks in that solemn manner to me, and says I must seriously consider whether we shall be happy together, it does just give me a feeling *here*"—with her hand upon her bosom.

"Clare, I must put an end to this at once and for ever. I will make a clean breast to you before we leave this room; and then you must judge for yourself whether I am to be trusted for the future or not."

"O no! Frank, please don't; it will look as though you did not believe I trust you."

“I do believe it, Clare. But you may trust too blindly ; and I owe it to myself to tell you everything before we are married. Come and sit down on the sofa by me, and prepare yourself for a long-winded tale. You know that my father died early in life, leaving me, an only child, like yourself, to be brought up by my mother, who indulged me, as widowed mothers do indulge only sons, to the ruin of themselves and others. As soon as I was old enough to follow my father’s profession I entered the army, and then the worst part of my life began. I had sufficient money of my own to enable me to pursue pleasure without reserve. I had very little principle to restrain me from going astray ; and the women whom I met in garrison towns were chiefly of that class who do their best to drag a man downwards, even though it be against his will.”

“But what woman could help loving you, and trying to make you love her in

return?" says Clare, innocently, with her face against his.

"That is *your* opinion, is it, Sweetheart? But the women I speak of had no such laudable intentions in their pursuit of me; it was my purse they loved, not myself. And after I, like a greenhorn as I was, had experienced one or two disappointments in the matter, I became almost as hardened as themselves, until—until——"

"Until—what, darling?"

"O! Clare," cries Iredell, with sudden emotion, "it is so hard, so bitter for me to speak to you of it all. When I look back into the past, I think *what am I* that I should dare to claim so pure a hand and heart as yours? My life has been, in some of its phases, so vile—so degraded. How can I mention it in your innocent ears, that may never even have heard of the crimes I have wantonly committed?"

"Frank dear, I don't think I am so



innocent as you seem to imagine. I don't think any girls are. We know pretty well what is going on in the world, though we may never be mixed up with it; and I dare say I can understand it all without your telling me. So don't tell me, Frank; I take it all for granted, and I love you notwithstanding. Will not that satisfy you?"

"You are an angel; but I shall feel happier when you have heard it. I don't want your mother to get at any secrets of my past life after we are married, and say that I deceived you. Besides, I consider you have a right to know, Clare. When I was a very young man, therefore, ten years ago or more—when I was very careless and unthinking, remember that—I was thrown in the way of a married woman!"

"*Married*, Frank?"

"Yes, married, my darling! You had better know the worst at once; and I—I bolted with her."

"Do you mean you took her from her husband?"

"I took her from her husband! That he was a brute, and not fit to be the husband of any woman, is no palliation of the crime. I eloped with another man's wife, and all the world knew it. I have tried to tell you this story a thousand times over, Clare, and my courage has always failed me. O! don't shrink from me, darling, or you will make me wish I had cut out my tongue before I mentioned anything so disgraceful in your presence. Remember, it all happened such a long, long time ago."

"What was her name, Frank?"

"Do you think it best I should tell you? Though the story was public property at the time, it has blown over now, and you might some day come across members of her family."

"What became of her?"

“She left me for another man. It was only what I might have expected; I had no right to complain, but it hit me hard at the time, Clare.”

“*She left you for another man!*” exclaims the girl in a tone of the utmost astonishment.

“She did; and I am thankful to say he married her, so that anxiety was taken off my mind. I narrowly escaped losing my commission on account of the *ésclandre* I caused in the regiment by my folly, and I got an exchange to India in consequence, and remained there for some years till the scandal had well-nigh evaporated. Clare, don’t say you hate me! Remember, I had never met you then.”

“And she left you; and her desertion caused you pain. O! the wretch—the heartless, miserable wretch! *I hate her!*”

Clare has never spoken so vehemently on any subject in his presence before. Iredell looks at her with amazement.

"How *could* she leave you?" continues the girl, as she flings herself headlong into his arms; "how *could* she—how *could* she? And when you loved her too? O! Frank! my dearest, she never cared for you as I do. I wouldn't have left you whatever you said—whatever you did; I would have clung to you to my life's end as I do now—as I do now!"

And here her unusual excitement ends, as such vehemence will with women, in a burst of tears.

Iredell is marvellously touched. For such a display of emotion on the part of Clare Brodhurst means double what it would with any other woman.

"My own darling," he says, as he holds her close to his heart, "I know it—I believe it. But thank God she did not, Clare, for I should have been linked for life to a woman who would have dragged me down lower each year we lived together. I grew

reckless after that business, dear, and I would not sully your mind with an account of the few years that followed it. My mother died, and I became completely my own master. I have knocked about England, never having a *home* anywhere, and, till I met you, I have been at the beck and call of every woman that chose to honour me with her notice. You would think, wouldn't you, that such an experience as I have had should be enough to sober any man? but, by Jove! it hasn't sobered me, Clare. I'm as mad after a pretty face and a neat pair of ankles as ever I was, and I don't believe I shall be cured till the sod covers me—if then."

"Never mind that," whispers Clare, reassuringly, as she strokes the large hand she holds between her own. "We have agreed to ignore all that—haven't we? And you're to flirt as much as ever you like, Frank."

"You promise then, when we're married, that you won't be jealous every time I pay a woman a compliment, or squeeze her hand?"

"What nonsense! As if I should. Credit me with more sense than that."

"There is many a wife that would be—your mother, for instance. I bet she never let your father out of her sight."

Clare laughs.

"I don't know I'm sure. She never confided so far in me as that." Then, suddenly sobering, she adds: "Frank, you don't know how glad I feel that you should have placed this confidence in me."

"You will never abuse it, dearest, I am sure. It is the sort of thing a man can only tell his wife. But now you have heard the worst, and Lady Brodhurst will be unable to enlighten you any further, or to make you doubt my love for you by any fresh suspicions. Of course I have flirted

a great deal since then, and in one or two instances have carried on the game rather far ; but life in a garrison town is made up of such petty intrigues. You would hardly care to wait here whilst I made a full confession of all the lies I've told and folly I've committed during the last ten years, would you, Clare ?”

“No, dear Frank ; not if we are to have any dinner to-day, though' it is not much past twelve now. Consider them confessed, and here is my absolution ;” and she turns and kisses him.

“Ah ! Clare !” sighs Iredell, “if I had only met *you* ten or fifteen years ago, what a different man I might have been.”

“Yes, darling ; only as I was but five years old fifteen years ago, I am afraid I should not have been of much use in keeping you in the right way then—eh ? Now I wont have your face clouded any more. Let us forget all that has passed between

us—you know it was not by *my* wish you set yourself so unpleasant a task. I have always considered that a wife has no right to make the least inquiry into her husband's former life. It has nothing to do with her. And I am *very nearly* your wife now, am I not, Frank?"

"Thank God, yes!" replies Iredell, fervently.

"So no more confessions, Colonel Iredell, please, for I've no time to waste in hearing them."

"Only one word, Clare. What did your mother tell you about Miss Stewart and myself yesterday?"

"She said you kissed her——"

"But I didn't—not her face, at least; it was only her arm, and the minx stuck it right under my nose, so that I could hardly have avoided it if I had wished to do so."

"And you *didn't* wish—I understand it



all perfectly. I'm not jealous, Frank; so remember that, once and for all."

"But the wonderful part to me is, that with the possession of such a perfect woman as yourself I can ever be such a fool as to want even to *look* at another! It is marvellous! Now, you must know that I don't care two straws about Miss Emmy Stewart, and am perfectly indifferent as to whether I ever see her again or not. And yet I kissed her stupid little arm, and actually promised to go and see her in London. But I shan't go, you may take my word for that."

"Frank, I hope you *will* go. Because mamma, having surprised you and all that sort of thing, must make it very disagreeable for the poor girl, and if you fail to keep your promise of visiting her, she may think *I* have had something to do with the omission. And I don't want to lie under that onus, sir."

"I shall *not* go, Clare. The girl will expect me to kiss her again if I do. I've made an ass of myself once, and I've no intention of doing so a second time."

"Darling! I think you ought to go. I don't want to get the character of being jealous, or of preventing your paying ordinary attentions to other women."

"My dear child, once for all, *I will not*. Why should I waste my time when in London—I get up seldom enough as it is—by going to see a trumpery little schoolgirl, and listening to her twaddle? I shall have my leave fully occupied now, Clare, with preparing for the important event of the 22nd. Why, I haven't even chosen the tie yet. Fancy leaving a decision of such vital importance to the last moment."

"I am sure I shall never look at your tie," says Clare, laughing. She has urged his keeping his promise to Miss Stewart,

but she cannot help feeling quietly happy that he is resolved to break it. What true woman does not purr under the consciousness that her lover is sublimely indifferent to any female company but her own?

"But I hope you *will* look at me from head to foot," replies Iredell, gaily; "else why should I have spent hours in consultation with my tailor and bootmaker, in order that I may do credit to the occasion?"

"You couldn't fail to do that, if you tried," says the girl, softly.

"You little flatterer! you spoil me to that degree that I do not know sometimes if I am standing on my head or my feet."

"Mamma says that. She said last night that when we were married I should utterly spoil you, and you were just the sort of person to take advantage of indulgence."

"I am very much obliged to Lady Brodhurst for her opinion, and it is like her to try and imbue you with it. But, O Clare! don't let her melancholy forebodings make you alter your conduct. Go on spoiling me, darling (if to heap coals of fire on a man's head, by loving him far more than he deserves, is to spoil him), for, depend upon it, many more husbands have been faithless to their wives for lack of spoiling than from excess of it. Clare, I have hungered and thirsted all my life for the love of a true woman like yourself. Don't take it back, my beloved. Give it me without stint, in all its freshness and abundance, and, before God, you shall not find me unworthy of it."

"I will, Frank, I will! I am every bit yours, body, heart, and soul; and I live for no other reason than to love you."

They are silent for a few moments;

there is a silence that is more eloquent than words, and then Iredell disengages Clare's arms gently from his neck, and rises from the sofa.

"I'm afraid I must be off, my darling. I have an engagement at my club for four o'clock this afternoon, and shall miss it if I do not catch the up-train at two."

"When shall I see you again, Frank?"

"I shall run down on Saturday, I hope, and stay till Monday. I shall be glad when the time for saying 'good-by' is over, Clare."

"So shall I, dear."

"That long-talked-of month in Italy will be very enjoyable this cold weather; at least I hope *you* will find it so. I have no doubt of myself."

"Nor I, Frank. I have no doubt of anything any more. And I feel twice your friend now that you have told me of that circumstance in your past life."

"Clare," says Iredell, seriously, "I told it you, as I said, because I felt you had a right to know it. But now that confidence is established between us, dearest, please don't allude to it again. I don't want to remember all my married life what a fool I made of myself once. The mention of it can do no good to you, myself, or the woman I wronged, and only revives unpleasant recollections. So we will make an agreement to let it remain a sealed book to us henceforward."

"Anything you wish, Frank," she answers, and then they leave the room together in search of Lady Brodhurst; and the farewells being exchanged, in another hour Iredell finds himself upon his way to London.





## CHAPTER V.

MISS EMMY STEWART.

**N**ATURALLY enough, Iredell finds plenty of business to occupy him at this period in London. There is not only that most important necktie, over which he laughed with Clare, to be selected, but the furniture for the little house in Woolwich to which he intends to take his wife, and over the choice of which his artistic taste leads him to be most particular. Iredell is not a man of fortune; but he has sufficient money of his own to have rendered him a suitable candidate on that score in the eyes of Miss Brodhurst's guardians for the honour of the heiress's hand.

He has sufficient indeed to satisfy the wants of any two reasonable people, and to have covered a multitude of extravagant sins of his own; for Iredell has never been guilty of neglecting to discharge the obligations due to him.

He can walk through the world upright and free, and (so far as his purse is concerned) owing no man anything.

It is untold pleasure to him to traverse London now, picking up a carved table here, or an antique bookcase there, in order that Clare's sitting-room shall be as fanciful and artistic in appearance as possible. Clare has been used to every kind of luxury, but it has been essentially modern luxury—the glass and alabaster and gilding of the furniture of the nineteenth century; and Iredell anticipates the delight of introducing the beauties of carved oak and old brass and antique china to her notice, and teaching her to love them (for taste has to be edu-



cated as well as mind) for his sake and their own.

Military life is so uncertain that the little nest in preparation at Woolwich may not be their resting-place for long; but while it is so, Iredell is determined that it shall be as pretty as money and care can render it. So, instead of bestowing unlimited confidence in Maple, or Oetzmann, or Druce, he goes patiently from one establishment to the other, choosing each article for himself, his whole heart filled with loving thoughts the while of the days that are coming, and the girl who is to brighten them.

He is up in London almost every afternoon of the week following his departure from Brodhurst Hall, being especially coerced in his mind regarding a certain set of dining-room chairs which are being made for him, and which he much fears will not be completed before he leaves England, and feels quite sure, in that case, will never be

ready by the time he returns. As he walks across Hyde Park one afternoon, after having paid his periodical visit to, and bestowed his periodical curses on, the defalcant upholsterer, he comes across, to his momentary astonishment, Miss Emmy Stewart.

Iredell has scarcely thought twice of this young lady since the morning after the ball, and has not maintained, as he told Clare, the slightest intention of calling upon her in London. In fact, he has forgotten both her aunt's name and address. And he is striding past her now, with his eyes upon the ground, his mind filled with Clare and the dining-room chairs, when he is startled from his reverie by the sound of her voice—

“Colonel Dale!”

He looks up then, and sees her standing in his pathway: the very prettiest of pictures in her fashionable spring costume,

with her black eyes looking up archly at him from under the brim of her hat, and those wicked dimples in full play on either side her mouth.

“Miss Stewart! ten thousand pardons! What must I have been thinking of not to see you?”

“Ah! that is just what I would like to know, Colonel Dale. Fancy my meeting you here! Isn’t it extraordinary? Is this the first time you have been up in town since we met at Brodhurst Hall?”

“No, not quite,” he answers, not confusedly—Iredell never *is* confused before women—but consciously. “But are you alone, Miss Stewart?”

“Yes. I hope you don’t think it very improper; but I am going to spend the evening with some friends in Kensington, and the day is so fine, I thought I should like to walk across the Park. But only

fancy my meeting you! And where are you going?"

"I *was* going just in the opposite direction to call on some old friends in Bayswater."

"O! you can spare time to walk with me as far as the gates, can't you?"

"If I had not the time I would *make* it," replies Iredell, as he turns and saunters by her side.

"You haven't been to see *me* yet," says Miss Stewart, with a bit of a pout, opening the conversation.

"No. I have really been so much engaged, Miss Stewart. I hope you will forgive me for the omission. And then a soldier's time, you know, is not entirely his own."

"What can you have had to engage you?"

"Scores of things! Shopping for one."

"Shopping! What nonsense!"

"What! Cannot you sympathise with me? What would you say if I told you that I was furnishing a house?"

"I shouldn't believe it!"

"You incredulous girl. It is the truth though, for all that."

"Why, what can you want with a furnished house, Colonel Dale?"

"Do you suppose I eat and drink off the ground like a savage? Mayn't I be allowed to have a chair to sit on and a table to sit at?"

"O! of course; but unmarried officers generally live in furnished lodgings, don't they, or barracks?"

"Who told you I was unmarried?"

"You are—aren't you?"

The quick look and tone of anxiety with which Emmy Stewart puts this question, betrays in what direction her ideas have been wandering.

Iredell laughs. He notes the look and

the tone, and yet he laughs as he replies to them.

His vanity is gratified by Miss Emmy Stewart's evident interest, and one can be wonderfully callous to the pain of others when our own feelings are safely at rest.

"Well, I am, and I am not! I am not married at this particular moment, but I shall be this day month. So you see I'm neither 'fish, flesh, nor good red herring,' as the Scotch say. It's an awkward kind of position to be in, isn't it? One does not feel *quite* a bachelor, and yet one decidedly is *not* a married man. I wonder I have not mentioned it to you before; we had such a nice long talk in the conservatory together. But I had something better to think of then than my own worthless self. And, indeed, I was not vain enough to imagine that the subject would be of any interest to you. Do you wish to sit down?"

For Emmy Stewart has turned aside from the path on which they are walking towards a bench placed beneath the trees.

"Yes, please; I feel a little tired. I should like to rest," she answers; and as she seats herself, he stands before her, switching away the few remaining dead leaves that lie around them with his cane.

There is an awkward pause. Iredell is not conceited enough to imagine that his few hours' flirtation has left such an impression on this girl's mind that the sudden news of his engagement is too much for her to bear. Yet he *does* feel that his conduct has misled and disappointed her, and that this little pretence of being tired is only an excuse to gain time to recover the surprise of the announcement.

He makes the leaves fly in every direction for a few minutes, feeling guilty and uncomfortable the while, and then he says, with a short laugh—

"What made you think I was a gay bachelor? Don't I look like an engaged man?"

"Not a bit."

"Tell me the characteristics of one, and I will do my best to adopt them. What are they?"

"I know nothing about them, and care less, Colonel Dale. And so you are to be married next month?"

"Yes; on the twenty-second. By the way, Miss Stewart, it's of no earthly consequence, but you haven't got my name quite right."

"Haven't I. What is it?"

"Iredell—Francis Iredell."

"How strange! I asked you last Tuesday night if I had it correctly and you said 'yes.'"

"Did I? I must plead guilty to forgetting what I said. You don't expect a man to remember all that passes after supper at a ball, do you?"



"No; I suppose not. And so your name is Iredell. Are you any relation to the man Miss Brodhurst is going to marry, then?"

"I am the man!"

"*You!* You are going to marry Clare Brodhurst! O! Colonel Iredell, why didn't you tell me that before?" And Emmy's pretty face glows like the setting sun.

"My dear child, I would have told you at once if I had thought you wished to hear it. But I do not as a rule make it the first piece of information I bestow upon my friends. I leave them to find it out for themselves. Besides, it had nothing whatever to do with our little flirtation, which went on remarkably well without it. Didn't it, now?"

Emmy is silent; and she has turned her face away so that he cannot even read the expression in her eyes.

"You are not angry with me, are you?"

he asks after awhile. "I was too much occupied with you to think of myself. And I thought everybody in the room knew who I was."

"O! it doesn't signify; it's of no consequence," she says, shortly, as she rises from the seat and resumes her walk towards Kensington.

Iredell paces by her side uneasily. He does not care one jot about this little woman, and yet simply because she *is* a woman he cannot bear that she should think coldly of him. But the case is such that the more excuses he makes for his reticence, the more he must needs infer that ignorance of the position in which he stands was of any moment to her; and so he feels tongue-tied, and has nothing to say for himself—a most unusual thing for Iredell.

"You know Miss Brodhurst, I believe?" he ventures to remark, presently.

"Only just to bow to. They have never lived at the Hall within my recollection."

"May I say, then, that I hope you *will* know her?"

Emmy does not reply.

"I daresay we shall often be down at the Hall," continues Iredell. "Indeed, it will belong to Miss Brodhurst as soon as she comes of age, and we shall meet then, I have no doubt. We will give a big ball, shall we?—just such another as they had there the other night, and you shall help Clare to send out the invitations. I know you love dancing, for you told me so."

"I am very seldom at home," says Miss Stewart, indifferently. "It was quite a chance I was there last week."

"A very lucky chance for me," interpolates her companion.

For the life of him, the rascal cannot help wishing that loyalty to Clare permitted his comforting the disappointed little soul

by his side with a few warm looks and pressures. But no ! (as he says to himself) he will be good ; and so he keeps his glance resolutely bent upon the ground, and refuses to encounter the temptation of her eyes and dimples.

“ And I don’t care about women—and that’s the truth of it—so *there !*” continues his pretty companion, with a sudden burst of asperity.

“ That is not a singular opinion for one of their own sex to hold,” says Iredell. “ How fortunate it is that there are some deluded mortals who *do* like them, eh ? And indifference towards the society of ladies has nothing whatever to do with our contemplated dance at Brodhurst Hall, on which I have already set my mind. But perhaps you won’t care to dance with me when I’m a married man ?”

“ Will it make any difference to your dancing, then ?”

"I trust not. I am sure of one thing—that it will never make any difference to my admiration of you."

Emmy Stewart has partially recovered herself by this time. The shock, though sudden, was brief; and she is ready now to look upon Iredell as the property of another, and even to derive a certain increase of satisfaction from flirting with him under those conditions.

"O! Colonel Iredell, you shouldn't talk to me like that," she answers, simpering.

"Ah! there are those dear little dimples again. Now you look like yourself, Miss Stewart. And why may I not talk to you '*like that*?' What did I say?"

"Why, all that nonsense, you know, about admiration for me; though, of course, you don't mean it."

"But I *do* mean it! Do you suppose because a man's engaged or married that he is to shut his eyes thenceforward, and

not even look at the beauty that passes before them? Why, he would be a fool, or worse. I hope most devoutly I shall never lose my appreciation for loveliness wherever I may find it."

"But what will Miss Brodhurst say to that?" demands Emmy, archly.

At this allusion to Clare, Iredell's face changes. It is easy to read where his love is centred. He can mention her name himself, but he cannot bear to hear it spoken lightly by another's lips, and especially the lips of a woman to whom he would as soon think of confiding what he feels for his future wife, as what he feels for his God. So he waives the subject hurriedly, but with decision.

"We wont bring anybody else's name into the discussion, please. I was speaking in the abstract. Don't let us individualise further than by saying that I shall never cease to consider Miss Stewart one of the

fairest specimens of womanhood that my eyes have had the good fortune to light upon."

"O! I'm sure I don't want to talk about anybody else. You can't suppose it's a pleasant subject to *me*."

"Don't be a little goose," says Iredell, patronisingly.

For he has looked down as Emmy spoke, and watched the pout of her cherry lips, and the purposely displayed heaving of her bosom.

"Why should I be a goose because I don't care to hear all about your marriage and your love-making, and the rest of your nonsense? Go and tell it to somebody who doesn't care a pin what becomes of you," exclaims Emmy Stewart, with the most charming feminine inconsistency and the slightest possible falter in her voice, as she stops beneath a spreading tree, and pulls her handkerchief from her pocket.

To tell the plain truth, Iredell is ex-

ceedingly amused; and if it would not be abominably rude, he would laugh outright at her folly. But other women before Emmy Stewart have fallen victims to his fascination at the first encounter, and so he supposes she can't help it, poor little dear! and his second impulse is to compassionate and comfort her.

"My dear child!" he commences, as he gets hold of her hand, and prepares himself for the delivery of a *bonâ fide* paternal lecture.

"How do you do, Colonel Iredell? And you, Miss Stewart, too? This *is* a coincidence!" exclaims a cheery voice from the next belt of trees, as the pair addressed start confusedly away from one another, and the person of Mr. Trotter, one of Miss Brodhurst's guardians and trustees, appears upon the scene.

"Ah! how are you, Trotter?" replies Iredell, with as much indifference of voice



and manner as he can summons at a moment's notice.

"Well, Colonel—well, thank you; and just on my way to Brodhurst Hall. Likely to see you down there to-night, eh?"

"No; unfortunately, I have to return to Woolwich, and cannot run into Brambleshire again until Saturday. My best regards to them both."

"Ah! I shall say I met you, of course. And can I carry any commands for you, Miss Stewart? Any message to your papa or mamma? I suppose you are staying in town?"

"Yes, with my aunt, and I was going to take tea with some friends at Kensington, when I met Colonel Iredell quite by accident; and so I thought there would be no harm," commences to blurt out Emmy Stuart, in her confusion and surprise, and desire to shield her position from blame.

Iredell takes the words and excuses out of her mouth.

"Yes—yes. As Miss Stewart remarks, Trotter, I was fortunate enough to meet her on the broad walk, and volunteered to see her safely to the gates. No, I have no message, thank you, except that I shall be down on Saturday without fail. Good afternoon. I am quite at your service, Miss Stewart."

And the two move on their way, leaving Mr. Trotter to pursue his.

"I thought it best not to enter into further conversation with him, or he might have delayed us, and made you late for your friends," says Iredell, anxious not to recur to the subject of their interrupted conversation.

"O! my friends are of no consequence; they do not expect me at any particular time," replies Emmy, who would evidently not object to the interview being protracted for a few minutes.

But they have nearly reached the gates by this time; and Iredell hails the first passing cab, and puts her in it; then with a slight pressure of the little gloved hand, and *one* look (which he really cannot help, for her eyes are bent so wistfully upon his), he sends her on her way, and retracing his steps towards his friend's house, thinks no more of the occurrence.

Mr. Trotter meanwhile makes his way down to Brodhurst Hall, where, after the manner of an amiable Paul Pry, without any malice prepense in his disposition, but with so little tact as to be in reality as mischievous amongst his friends, he relates the circumstances under which he met Colonel Iredell.

"I have a piece of news for you, Miss Clare," he says, in the midst of dinner. "Who do you suppose I ran against this afternoon in Kensington Gardens?"

"Why, Frank, of course," replies Clare,

not considering the riddle worth the pretence of guessing.

“Just so; and he sent all kinds of sweet messages to you, and your mamma here, which I was bound, upon the severest penalties, to deliver.”

“Why have you not delivered them, then?”

“Well, really now, you know, Miss Clare, it is not easy to carry lovers’ messages all this distance without some of their delicate meaning evaporating by the way. They’re like perfume, you know—perfume, that must be inhaled personally to be properly appreciated. Ha! ha! ha! The Colonel appeared very well, however, and very happy. He was walking with Miss Emmeline Stewart, the daughter of your good rector here; or rather, I should say, they were having a little tête-à-tête under the shade of a tree when I first saw them;—beautiful

the trees are beginning to look in Hyde Park, Lady Brodhurst;—and I understood from Miss Stewart that they were going to spend the evening with some friends in Kensington. You should look sharper after the Colonel, Miss Clare, and make him give account of all his doings when away from you—you should, indeed. Ha! ha! ha!”

“With *whom* did you say Colonel Iredell was holding a tête-à-tête?” demands Lady Brodhurst, with chilling emphasis. She has heard the name perfectly well; but she is determined it shall not by any unlucky chance escape the ears of her daughter.

“With Miss Emmeline Stewart, that pretty little gipsy with the sparkling black eyes, who was playing the mischief with all the young fellows at your pleasant ball here last week.”

“O! indeed!”

Lady Brodhurst having delivered herself

of this oracular sentence, looks across the table at her daughter, as though she would say, "Now you can judge for yourself. *This* is the sort of man you choose to marry, in defiance of my opinion and advice! Miss Emmy Stewart again! I hope you heard that."

And Clare—all the loyalty and honour and reverence she feels for her absent hero surging in her breast—answers her mother's look in words.

"I remember her, Mr. Trotter, well. She *is* a very pretty girl. Colonel Iredell danced with her several times, I think, on Tuesday, and told me he was going to call on her in London."

"Ah! of course he would, naturally, Miss Clare; and you take my little joke as you take everything—just as I meant you to do. Ha! ha! ha!"

Yet—though after their conversation of a few nights before, Lady Brodhurst no

longer ventures to question Iredell's conduct in the hearing of his future wife, and the mother and daughter do not further allude to the piece of intelligence brought them by Mr. Trotter—Clare cannot help just wondering to herself, with half a sigh, why, if Frank intended calling on Miss Stewart in London, he should have so determinately refused to comply with *her* request that he should do so.





## CHAPTER VI.

### “THE WEDDING DAY.”

**N**OTHING further in any degree unpleasant occurs before the wedding day. Iredell spends every moment he can spare from military duty with the Brodhursts, and Clare is perfectly happy and at rest regarding him and her unknown future. For, with all his lightness and gaiety of temperament, there is something in Iredell's character that commands the respect of those about him, and especially of his future wife; and where a woman both loves and respects, she is content to follow, however blindly.

Miss Brodhurst waits the advent of her wedding day with feelings very different



from those with which most young ladies look forward to that important epoch of their lives. The dress in which she is to be decked for the occasion possesses no interest for her; on the contrary, she shrinks from the idea of wearing it.

"I wish it were not necessary," she says to her horrified mother. "Why does society insist on such a vulgar, foolish custom, as making people wear evening dress in broad daylight? Besides which, it is so remarkable. I should like to be married in a walking costume."

"It would be far more remarkable if you were," replies Lady Brodhurst, in her most dignified manner; "and as my only child and heiress, Clare, it is a duty I owe to the world to see that your wedding-dress is in accordance with your position in life. It would be the talk of the town if you were married in colours. I never heard of such a thing. Is it Colonel Iredell who has been

putting these absurd ideas into your head? I know men have their own peculiar notions as to what is suitable and becoming; but we cannot fly in the face of custom to please them."

"O! no; Frank has never mentioned the subject to me. I do not suppose he will even look at my dress. I am sure I shall not look at his."

"But there will be plenty of people present with no other object in view but to look at you both. You don't dress for yourself in this world, remember, but for others. The full description of what you are to wear will be sent to the *Morning Post* and *Court Circular* the day before."

"Very well, dear mamma. It will make no difference to me," says Clare, indifferently, as she moves away. "Only let me have something very quiet to go away in, for Frank hates bright colours."

It is imperative that the ceremony should

take place in public, therefore Clare submits to the inevitable; but she longs for the time to be over, and her conduct and feelings subjected to the comments of no one but her husband.

She looks beyond the perspective of tittering bridesmaids and complimentary toast-drinkers, and well-meaning but officious jesters, to the moment when she and Iredell shall find themselves together and alone, as the labourer looks forward through the vista of work to the time of rest and peace. She detests the fuss and parade attendant on, but so wonderfully out of place with, a religious ceremony. And now that the day has come so near she longs for it to be over, for good and all, and that she were free to place her hand in Iredell's, and go wherever he may choose to take her.

And Iredell, too, fond as he is of turning every subject under Heaven into a jest,

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seldom jests upon this. Perhaps the solemnity which overshadows Clare's face whenever the topic is alluded to, may have had some hand in restraining his lawless tongue; but from whatever cause, the effect is evident. The nearer the day approaches, the more he feels his own unworthiness to undertake so great a charge as the guidance of this young girl's life, though for how long afterwards the responsibility will trouble him remains to be proved. Iredell is not used to be staggered by the difficulty of any undertaking; but marriage is a very serious business, and there are few men or women who can contemplate it with utter levity. The importance of the step they are about to take seems to impress them both with more than usual force, on the evening of the 21st, as they sit together on a sofa in the dusk, in the back drawing-room of Lady Brodhurst's town house.

“And so this is the very last day,” says Iredell, meditatively. “What do you think of that, Clare?”

She does not say what she thinks of it, but she turns her head towards him in the twilight, and lays her cheek upon his shoulder.

“The last day, my darling,” he repeats; “and by this time to-morrow you will be Clare Iredell. Does the prospect frighten you? Would you like to draw back before it is too late?”

“Don’t, Frank.”

“What am I to understand from, ‘Don’t, Frank?’ Is it a paraphrase of *Punch’s* ‘Advice to those about to marry?’ It might mean anything, Clare.”

“It means, don’t laugh about anything so solemn.”

“Now you’re frightening me. I shall begin to tremble if you talk so seriously. Now, what is this little hand shaking

with? Is it love, or is it fear? For fear means distrust in me Clare."

"O! Frank, it is love and fear together. Love in return for your love, and fear that I may not prove worthy of it."

"It is I who should say that, Sweet-heart. I have led such a careless, reckless, unholy life, how can I be fit to make a young innocent creature like you my wife?"

"I am coming to make a new life for you, Frank."

"You will—a life as fresh and beautiful as your own. But you cannot unmake my past."

"We will forget it, dearest," she whispers.

"Not I—I can never forget. But you believe in my present, Clare, don't you? You believe that my entire love is given to you now, and that no woman will ever have the power to shake my fidelity to

you. Say you believe in me and trust me, or I shall be miserable."

"If I did not believe in you, could I be going to marry you to-morrow, and feel as happy as I do about it?"

"I don't know, my child," he answers, in a desponding tone; "girls seem to marry without any thought nowadays, as if marriage were a necessary step to preserving their status in society; and society, satisfied with birth, money, and position, it little signifies what the man is like who helps them up the ladder, or whether love is included in the transaction at all."

"O! Frank, you do not class me with such girls as those?"

"No, no, no!—a thousand times no—I could not love you if I did. But you are very inexperienced, Clare, and have not seen many men besides myself, and I am so much older than you are. Suppose I

should fail to please upon a nearer inspection?"

"Frank; such an idea is impossible for me to grasp. It is of no use my attempting it. Why should I not worry myself rather with the fear that you will find my companionship dull and uninteresting? I have not led the varied life you have—I am only an ignorant girl. How tame I must appear to you after all the clever and beautiful women you have associated with."

"Don't mention them," he exclaims, hurriedly; "don't let me remember them, at all events to-day. It is sacrilege both to the time and the subject of our conversation. Then you are content to take me as I am, darling?"

"I am content to begin my married life with perfect trust in you, Frank."

"God bless you!" he says, in answer, as he catches the girl in his arms and



strains her to his heart. And then, his mind made perfectly easy on the score of her faith in him and her new life, Iredell shakes off the little gloom that has temporarily overshadowed him, and becomes hilariously excited and gay. "We will have such times, my darling—such happy, glorious times! I will show you all the places in Italy and Genoa with which I am so familiar, and it will be as good as seeing them for the first time over again to watch the delight and wonder in your face. I know you love paintings and statuary, and all such works of art, as much as I do, and I can conceive no greater pleasure than introducing you to the galleries of Florence and Rome. We will make this a *real* holiday, Clare—all sight-seeing and good dinners, wont we, pet?" says Iredell, with his joyous laugh.

Clare smiles at the idea of the "good

dinners," and creeps closer to his side, as though she would intimate that *her* holiday will consist in being with him.

"*When* were you so much in Italy, dear Frank?" she asks, presently. "Was it before you entered the army?"

She cannot see his face because the room is nearly dark, but she is surprised to hear the alteration in his voice as he hurriedly replies—

"No, my child, no! It was some time afterwards. Had we not better go into the next room now, Clare? Your mother will not thank me for monopolising you after this fashion on the last evening she will call you her own. For to-morrow, darling—to-morrow, you will be *mine*," and in listening to the soft, delicious echo of that triumphant whisper, Clare forgets that she has received no answer to the question which she put to him.

The morning dawns at last, and the

marriage ceremony proves a more trying ordeal than even Clare had anticipated. During the wedding and the breakfast, she manages to preserve a calm demeanour. Iredell is beaming with smiles, and it is difficult to feel sad whilst his laughing eyes seek hers every moment. Even in the church he has to be constantly frowned down by his mother-in-law or the bridesmaids; and the ladies who have come prepared to cry, and find themselves cheated by the hilarity of the bridegroom out of the feeblest excuse for such relief to their overcharged feelings, denounce his behaviour as frivolous and heartless, and very different from what they should have expected to see.

Lady Brodhurst, too, is disposed to find fault with his spirits, which seem to keep up those of Clare, and to argue that they evince very little concern for *her* grief in parting with her precious daughter. But

though Clare, who is not by nature a woman to wear her heart upon her sleeve, and who feels so constrained and unlike herself in white satin at twelve o'clock in the morning that she can hardly realise the position she is placed in, does not break down either during the ceremony or the breakfast, she goes through both ordeals very silently and gravely, hardly daring to trust her own voice or thoughts. And when the last moment really arrives, and she has to say good-by to her mother, Lady Brodhurst has no reason to complain of her indifference to their separation, for she clings to her like a little child, and sobs as bitterly.

"Mother! mother! I shall always be your own child! I shall indeed—nothing can alter that," is her cry.

And Lady Brodhurst holds the girl to her bosom, and thinks her heart will break. For let every surrounding to a marriage be

as favourable and prosperous as it can be—let it have been planned and hoped for and dreamt of for years, still, when the actual hour arrives, and the girl who has grown up beneath their eye must be delivered over for ever to the tender mercies of a comparative stranger, parents realise for the first time what it is to part with their own flesh and blood. Neither Lady Brodhurst nor Clare have realised it till this moment ; and as the remembrance of all her mother's past care and affection flashes across the girl's mind, she calls herself hard names, and thinks for an instant—only an instant—that it is impossible she can go through the sacrifice of separation. But here a vision of two grey-blue eyes, that followed her figure furtively as she rose from the breakfast-table, and met her glance as she turned to leave the room, comes back upon her heart, and asserts its divine authority. She can part from her mother, she *cannot* part from

Iredell. The knowledge gives her strength; she changes places with Lady Brodhurst, and becomes the comforter.

"We shall soon be back again, dearest mother; think of that. A month will be over in no time, and then we are coming straight to you. Don't cry so, dear mother, or I shall never be able to go."

Here a loud knock at the bedroom door luckily disturbs the sentimentality of the parting scene.

"Clare! my darling! if you don't make a little more haste changing those rags of yours we shall miss the three o'clock train. May I come in? The men are ready to carry down the boxes. I hope you haven't got more than sixteen, for they've only called one cab to carry them."

And in the face of Iredell's continued merriment, the mother and daughter are fain to dry their streaming eyes, and with

one long strain to each other's bosoms allow themselves to be separated.

"Thank God, that's over!" exclaims Iredell, as he throws himself down on the carriage cushions beside Clare; and they commence their journey to the station.

But Clare does not answer; her face is turned from him, and she is looking out of the window, although the blind is down. Yesterday she would have sworn she was ready to follow Iredell through the world; to-day, this moment, he seems almost like a stranger to her. She is married—it is really over—she belongs to him—there is no going back—and the thought frightens her!

Iredell perceives her mood, and smiles at it. He has no fear that she will indulge it long.

"Sorry to part with mamma, darling?" he says, kindly. "Never mind; we shall soon be home again."

Still the girl does not speak or turn towards him.

"*Clare!*" he says, earnestly—there is a world of reproach in his tone, and the tears begin to rise freshly in Clare's eyes. "Sweetheart," continues Iredell, in his soft, winning voice, "did you not promise to TRUST me?"

And as the words fall on her ear Clare turns and looks at him with beseeching eyes and quivering lips.

"My darling!" he exclaims, warmly, as he catches her in his arms; "may God judge me if I ever bring the tears into your eyes after to-day."







## CHAPTER VII.

### "THE HONEYMOON."

**T**HERE is no greater virtue in a man, nor one that binds him more securely to a woman's heart, than the virtue of unselfishness. And it is as rare as it is beautiful, for often the apparently greatest lovers are the most selfish in the appropriation of their property; whilst they deceive themselves, no less than others, with the idea that it is the excess of love that causes them to act as though no one existed in the world beside them.

Iredell, with all his faults—and he has faults enough, Heaven knows—is most unselfish; and Clare has not been his wife for many days before she finds it out, and loves

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him a thousand times better for the discovery. His paternal care for her; his patience with her girlish moods; his tenderness at all times, may be no more than any other man, deeply in love with a young and beautiful woman, would display—at all events during the honeymoon. But as Clare grows to know her husband better, and sees how constantly he gives up his wishes to hers; how little he considers himself; and how carefully he tries to conceal from her that he is making a sacrifice in her behalf, the maiden love with which she started in life with him ripens to a devotion of which she has not considered herself capable. And this is the sort of love with which Iredell has again and again inspired the other sex, even whilst not feeling it himself. Whether from his grand physical or mental qualities, or the combination of strength and tenderness which he exhibits, or the winning

ways which he has with women, it is difficult to say; but those who have been once attracted by him, even for frivolous or mercenary motives, find it very hard to forget the noble figure and the sweet-toned voice, when they have passed out of sight and hearing again. Even during their hurried visits to the different towns through which they pass on their road to Italy—even during the walks they take as strangers at their different halting-places, Clare cannot help observing how all the women seem to be attracted at first sight towards her husband. From the stumpy little Belgians to the thick-waisted, flaxened-haired Germans, and the dark-eyed, slender Venetians, Iredell meets with feminine homage wherever he goes. The kitchen wenches hang about the staircases to look at the “great, handsome English lord,” as he enters or leaves his hotel; the chambermaids lay wait for him as he smokes his cigar in the

gardens at night; the ladies start and whisper to each other as they encounter him in their daily strolls.

Clare sees it all, and feels her breast swelling with the pride of possession. It delights her, and she tells him so without reserve.

"There, Frank; did you see *that*?" she exclaims, pinching his arm, as they walk together in the twilight.

"What, my darling? I say, Clare, how you do pinch; you've no consideration for my poor arm."

"Great, big, strong arm! As if I could hurt it," replies Clare, with a second assault. "I mean that woman with the red rose in her bonnet—that passed us just now."

"What of her?"

"Didn't you see how she stared at you? And just look: she is standing still, gazing after you now."

"Is that all?"

"But it's because she admires you so, Frank. She is perfectly transfixed. She thinks you are the finest man she ever saw! I know she does."

"You little goose!"

"I'm not a goose. Everybody thinks the same. I see all the women I meet bursting with envy of me. First they look at you, and their eyes goggle; then they look at me, and their noses turn up. Even the flower-girl who offered you violets yesterday kept muttering to herself: 'Sancta Maria! did one ever see such a man!' And I am so proud of it all, Frank—so very, very proud!"

"Proud of what, you silly child?" he says, looking down fondly on the fresh girlish face and liquid eyes upturned to his.

"Of belonging to you, darling; of having you for my very own. When I remember that, I pity all the women that don't belong to you, and wonder how they manage to drag out their dreary, hopeless lives."

This idea tickles Iredell's sense of the ludicrous to that degree that it is some time before he can recover himself. But his laughter cannot shake Clare in her belief in him. The humility which prompts it only raises him in her estimation.

"My darling girl, so long as *you* are proud of me it is all I want or care for, and the rest of the feminine creation must make out their lives as best they can without me."

"I know that; for I would never *share* you with any one," replies Clare, with spirit.

"Holloa! So my turtle-dove can do something else than coo, can she? This is quite a novelty, Clare. I wonder now if I could make you jealous if I tried?"

"You had better not try," says the girl, with the saucy confidence of a heart that has never been subjected to that most bitter of all human ordeals.

They reach Italy without any obstacle,

and settle themselves for a few weeks in the city of Florence. From that moment life seems to pass for Clare Iredell like some happy dream. With the bustle and unavoidable inconvenience of travelling over, and nothing to do but to minister to Iredell's comfort, to wander with him amongst scenes of pleasure and beauty, or to listen to his still enraptured love-making, it is not strange that the young wife should feel as though she had never lived till now. She would be content to pass the rest of her existence in the same way, if it were possible. To rise in the morning with no heavier duty before her than to choose in which dress she will look most attractive to her husband over the breakfast-table ; to be able to sit beside him on the sofa for one hour, or two, or three, as it may suit her fancy, whilst she reads a scrap of poetry or a paragraph from the paper, and he plays with her hair or her hand, or lies at full

length upon the floor with his head in her lap; to saunter together in the cool of the evening, coming back laden with flowers and fruit for the supper-table; above all, to know for certain that, fair weather or foul—dark days or bright—they will be together henceforward and for ever. This seems to make the present almost too bright to last. A loving woman's life is love, and there is no doubt that it is charming on occasions to be able to lay aside the cares and worries of this world, and to be for once simply happy, and nothing more. And Iredell feels in this first blush of married life that he can never tire of it.

It is of no use for romantic old ladies and sentimental young ones, both in all probability equally ignorant of the sex, to call out against men for being unable at once to break through their bachelor habits, and settle down beside the connubial hearth like dear domestic female cats. They never



can do it, and they never will; or if here and there a solitary instance may be recorded of so sudden a transformation scene, it will generally be found that the principal actor in it was not worth an audience. For the wonder really is, not that so few men become quiet in harness under the matrimonial yoke, but that more do not kick over the traces, considering that they are expected to give up all the pleasures that have hitherto constituted life to them—and for what?

The companionship of a woman who has probably very little mind to begin with—the barest knowledge to cover the deficiency—and no tact to conceal what is lacking.

Mix this up with loss of freshness and appearance, a general cooling of affection and desire to please, a baby every year, and no increase of gain to meet the extra expenditure, and you have as pretty a mess to ask a man to resign his bachelor freedom

and pleasures for, as ever was set upon the matrimonial table.

What does a woman lose by a suitable marriage? Nothing! On the contrary, she gains position, security from want, freedom, and a status in society, in exchange for the reproach of being left an old maid. She has a larger range of pleasures—an extended circle of friends; she becomes of some importance to herself and others, and she is quite ready to accept and recognise the benefits she receives.

Yet she expects the man to give up his freedom and his friends, and sit down contented for the rest of his life, with her society and intellect as sole refreshment for his wearied brain and body.

The bargain is not a fair one. And the women who try to hold their husbands to it are generally those who lose them soonest. Is it wonderful that the majority of men should get tired of the majority of women?

We all know what it is to have set our hearts on the possession of a certain thing. It may be an article of great value, to obtain which we have laboured and waited for years, and the want of which we feel at every moment of our lives. We get it at last—the treasure is our own; no one will ever have the power to deprive us of it again. A great sense of contentment comes upon us; we look at our new possession twenty times a day, and congratulate ourselves as often on our unprecedented good luck.

Well, time goes on. The value of the article may be just as much appreciated by us; we might shrink with dismay from the idea of giving it up again, and fully remember to how much inconvenience we were subjected without it; but I put it to you, as sensible men and women—*do* we go on looking at it twenty times a day? Does not custom render us less enthusiastic,

though not perhaps less grateful? Do we not, as we see other articles of the same kind produced, bearing improvements which ours lack, just feel a little envious that newer purchasers should be more fortunate than ourselves? And may not the time arrive when, if our possession becomes rusty and useless and obsolete, we may feel disposed to cast it on one side and buy another?

Here is a tedious fable without the excuse of a moral. For my readers will tell me that I cannot justly compare a living woman, with a reasoning soul, to an inanimate piece of mechanism or an article of furniture. I am sure I wish I could not. I wish there were fewer women in this world with, to all appearance, no more souls in their bodies than watches or turning-lathes, and of not half the use in their generation of these inferior manufactures. But every-day life and observation prove but too forcibly that

it is the case, and that they marry and are given in marriage like other people.

Clare Iredell is not one of these soulless, unintellectual women. She is not a beautiful booby who will consider that having given herself to her husband there remains nothing more to be done, but that he shall fall down for the term of his natural life and worship her. She knows that she is beneath Iredell in intellect and experience and worldly knowledge, and that it is his goodness and love for her that makes him delight in her company—not the company itself. She has all the germs in her of a great and noble woman, who will rise hereafter to be a fitting friend and companion for the man who has chosen her from the world; but the fact remains, that at the present moment she is not a woman, but only a simple, inexperienced girl, who has seen nothing of life and heard less, and is quite unable even to talk with her hus-

band on his ordinary topics of conversation.

Iredell feels this at every turn. He has constantly to curb his tongue as he commences to relate some story which has come into his mind, and watches the beautiful look of complete innocence and inability to comprehend that rises to Clare's face at his allusion.

"It's too bad of me," he says one day, as he checks himself in the midst of a very ordinary anecdote; "I oughtn't to tell you such things, my darling."

"O, but *do*, dear Frank. I like to hear your stories," pleads Clare, in excuse for her own stupidity.

"No, I wont. I'm not going to sully your mind, my child, by explaining any *double-entendres* to you. It is refreshing in this age of naughtiness to find a woman who can *not* understand. Shut up those big eyes of yours, Clare, and don't keep

staring at me in that manner, or I shall begin to think I'm a monster of iniquity to have told you as much as I have."

And he kisses her, and thinks how much too good and innocent she is for him.

Still, the points of the anecdote have fallen flat—there is not a manner of doubt about that; and though Iredell is charmed to find his wife is so innocent she cannot understand them, he would not mind having some friend at hand who would redeem the apparent failure of the jest by taking it all in, and laughing at it heartily.

For Iredell, who has passed his life in the barrack and the mess-room, amidst fast men and women, lawless jests and strongly-seasoned stories, it is an effort to keep himself in hand and tone down his conversation to suit the pure ears of the girl he has made his wife. For Clare, though innocent at present, has sufficient quickness and intelligence to make an apt scholar, if

her husband once took her in hand and initiated her (as so many husbands do) to the mysteries of his own life. But this Iredell has too much respect for her even to contemplate. He admires her purity as we admire a stainless lily. He would not desecrate the whiteness of her mind by one evil thought or word; but the restraint is a little irksome to him, and he actually feels more at home with some of the strange Italian women who flash their dark eyes at him in passing, and bring with the action a quick sense of secret understanding, than he does with the English girl whom he would lay down his life to serve.

One evening, as Clare is walking with her hand upon Iredell's arm, she feels that sudden tightening of the muscles that tells her he has started, and looking up perceives a lady standing across their path, as though she would speak to them.



Iredell raises his hat, quickens his pace, and drags his wife past the stranger, who hesitates for a moment and then pursues her way.

"Who is that, Frank?" demanded Clare, in surprise. "Do you know her?"

"I have met her before, my darling. She is—let me see, I really forget her name—the Marchesa something or other. These foreigners all have titles. But it's of no consequence."

"I thought she was going to speak to you."

"I daresay she was, until she saw you. These Italian women are not remarkable, as you may have heard, for the reticence of their manners; and when she knew me before, she probably did not hear too good a character of me. Clare, my darling, you look tired. I shall call a carriage. I won't have you walk a step further."

"Indeed, it's not worth while, dear

Frank. Let me walk. I'll go home if I feel tired."

"*Not worth while!*" repeats Iredell, with those searching eyes of his fixed upon her happy face; "and when you're fatigued. Clare, you don't half know yet how precious my wife is to me!"

She does not oppose his wishes further, for she *is* tired. The sultry atmosphere of Italy commences to enervate her, and much as she is enjoying her new life, she looks forward with pleasure to breathing the fresh, cool air of her native land again. And she is fain to confess to herself a few minutes afterwards that it is pleasanter to drive through the beautiful country surrounding Florence, with her hand tightly clasped in that of Iredell, than to drag her weary feet after him through the hot and dusty streets of the city.

As they remount the steps of their hotel a waiter presents her husband with a letter.

"Is that the bill, dear?" Clare asks, carelessly, as she notes the annoyance Iredell's face displays whilst reading it, and the gesture with which he crumples up the paper and thrusts it into his pocket.

"No—no! darling! only a note on business," he replies, as he accompanies her to their apartments.

The over-fatigue that Clare has encountered is followed by a nervous headache, and Iredell persuades her to go to bed early, and watches her as tenderly as a mother watches her child, till she has fallen asleep with his kisses on her lips.

Then leaving the hotel, he lights a cigar and saunters slowly towards the spot where they walked that evening, when the first person almost that he runs against is the Marchesa Brindicci.

"You received my note?" she says, interrogatively, as Iredell raises his hat to her.

"Yes! or I should not be here at the present moment. I can hardly conceive, however, what motive you can have, Marchesa, for wishing to speak to me."

"First, say why you so palpably avoided me this afternoon."

"I was not alone."

"Ah! I saw that, of course. And who is the young lady, then—your sister?"

Iredell winces, but replies quickly—

"She is not my sister—she is my wife."

The Marchesa Brindicci starts with surprise. She is neither particularly pretty nor particularly young, but her concern at this piece of intelligence appears unaffected, and as she turns her large dark eyes up to Iredell's face in the moonlight, they are really anxious and troubled.

"You are jesting with me," she says, spasmodically.

"I assure you I am not! The lady who

was walking with me to-day is Mrs. Iredell. You can understand now why I did not seem anxious to recognise you."

"And poor Bertha! What of her?"

"*What of her?*" repeats Iredell, sternly. "*You* are not the person to put that question to me, Marchesa, considering that, for reasons best known to yourself, you were the cause of that unfortunate woman's further downfall; and I wonder you can take her name upon your lips, or think of her without a pang of shame."

"She is married. It is all hushed up again."

"Perhaps so, if marriage can hush up general infidelity. Believing from your note that you might have some intelligence to give me of her, I have come here to-night, Marchesa; but if that is not the case, I see no use in prolonging this interview."

"How cruel you are. We have not

met for six—seven years, and you grudge me a few moments' conversation. Ah! you have quite forgotten me, and I—I have but too well remembered you, Iredell."

"I have done anything but forget you. You gave me too much cause to remember you, madame."

"Because Adolph Rambeau was an acquaintance of mine——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't name that man to me," interrupts Iredell, fiercely.

"Ah! you feel the old sore still. I should hardly have thought it. You English are wonderful for your constancy," she says, with a sarcasm that stings him to answer—

"I do *not* feel it—in the sense you would imply. The wound has long since been healed, but I cannot forget, when in your presence, Bianca, that you were the one to inflict it. You urged that poor girl on to deceive me, you helped her in her in-

trigues with Rambeau, and permitted her to compromise her character to that degree that there was no issue left but one. *I* had not done the right thing by her—I fully acknowledge that—but she was, at all events, as happy and as virtuous as she could be under the circumstances, until she met you.”

“And did you never guess the reason *why* I had no courage to prevent her leaving you?”

“Never! Unless you derived a fiendish pleasure from seeing her dragged down as low as yourself.”

“Hush! Hush, my friend! You are not polite. No, Iredell, there was another motive, though perhaps you may not consider it a higher one. I wanted you for myself. I loved you—*I love you still*,” she adds, in a lower voice.

“*You loved me!*” echoes Iredell. The announcement awakens no feeling in his

breast but surprise; but it makes the crime of which she has been guilty appear less heinous in his eyes. For, after all, what will a woman *not* do, when she is in love—*with yourself!* "You loved me, Bianca! It is impossible—you never told me so. This is a trumped-up story, in order to excuse your past conduct to me."

"You may believe it or not, as you choose, Iredell, but it is the truth. O! I have suffered much on your account, you brave, beautiful man! And yet you are married!"

"Yes, I am married," replies Iredell, brought back by that remark, with a sense of shame, to his present position; "and for that very reason I cannot stay talking to you here. What is your business with me, Bianca? You must tell it and let me go."

"I want news of yourself, first of all, and then I want news of my poor Bertha."



"You know all that is necessary concerning myself; you see that I am still alive and well——"

"And as handsome as ever. Ah, Iredell, those eyes of yours have haunted me wherever I went."

"And with regard to—to—Madame Rambeau, I can tell you nothing," continues Iredell, secretly pleased, though without showing it, at the allusion to his eyes. "I have not heard of her for years past, and it is, as you know, more than seven since I saw her."

"You sigh at the remembrance."

"I shall always sigh at it, Bianca. I did then what I can never undo."

"Is that well, with a young wife at your side?"

"I beg you not to mention my wife's name in conjunction with the subject we are discussing," cries Iredell, hotly; "there is no connexion whatever between them."

"And you are not afraid then that Bertha will trouble the peace of your married life?"

"She cannot."

"Ah! my friend, women can do more than you give them credit for," replies the Marchesa, in a mocking tone. She is not pleased that her little declaration of weakness should have been passed over without further comment.

"I have just so much faith left in poor Bertha's consideration for me, that I do not believe she would willingly do me harm, even if she had the power. And she has not the power, poor girl."

"You regret her still," exclaims the Marchesa.

"I do *not* regret her," he repeats, firmly; but he has to bite his lip in order to do so. It is so hard entirely to forget the creature we have once loved.

"And you have not the least compassion

for *my* disappointment," says Bianca, plaintively.

Iredell turns and looks at her, but gravely. It is the worst possible moment she could have chosen in which to appeal to the very soft side of his nature, which he keeps for her sex alone.

"You have taken too much pains to put it out of my mind," he answers, gently. "But I am flattered, Bianca, deeply flattered by your preference; and I am grateful." And he puts out his hand to her.

She seizes and conveys it to her lips.

"If you are grateful, pay me back in kind," she exclaims, eagerly; "give me a little love in return, Iredell. I have waited for it so long."

He shakes his head.

"Why did you not ask me for it before, Bianca, when I might have found solace in accepting your offer? Now, as you must know, it is too late."

"Ah! you English are all so cold! You

have no hearts. You do not know what love is."

"I sometimes wish I never had," sighs Iredell.

"That English girl, with the pure, proud face, can she love you as I would?" demands Bianca.

But at this allusion to Clare, Iredell is himself again.

"Hush!" he says, authoritatively; "you remind me of my duty. I am going home now. Good night."

"O! Iredell, do not part from me so unkindly."

She comes close to him as she speaks, and lifts her face to his. They are alone in the moonlight, standing in the shadow of the deserted colonnade.

"Embrace me, my friend," she says, pathetically.

"To what intent?" demands Iredell.

"What!—you refuse me? You throw

back my offer; you would cover me with shame," cries the Marchesa, shrilly.

"Pshaw! you are talking idly. What meaning would there be in our kisses?" replies Iredell, as he turns away. But he has not gone two yards before another feeling comes over him. Perhaps what Bianca said is true — perhaps she loves him.

"Good night; God bless you!" he says, kindly, as he retraces his steps, takes her hand in his, looks in her upturned face for one moment, and then walks away from her again on his road home to Clare.

But he is not happy as he does so. The interview with Marchesa Brindicci has revived his most painful feelings with regard to the past. He begins to question why he was ever such an idiot as to come to Italy for his honeymoon, where every tree and turning remind him of the most unfortunate portion of his life's history. It must have

been fate that drove him there. And then to meet this woman, whose memory is so intimately associated with that of Bertha, and to have permitted her to rake up the ashes of his dead past, with coarse allusions to herself. Pah! why was he such a fool as to yield to her wishes? If, as she avows, and he knows for a certainty, she was the ulterior cause of poor Bertha's infidelity to himself, he ought to avoid her as he would a scorpion, if only for the memory of that miserable time!—*that miserable time!*

Iredell's brow grows clouded as he thinks of it. Does a man ever *quite* forget the woman he has once loved—whom he considered to be all his own for evermore, however much she may have subsequently betrayed, deceived, and cheated him? Will there not be moments until his life ends when her image will rise up before him as it appeared in the days when he believed her to be faithful; and his heart will ex-

perience over again the sharp, fierce pang it felt when the knowledge of her treachery burst upon it? There is more in the expression, "they shall be one flesh," than mere words to convey a meaning. It is hard to determine if those whose lives have been thus mysteriously blended in this world will ever be divorced again to the furthest confines of eternity. And yet with how little forethought men and women rush into such connexions, as though God's ordinance were not far more binding on their consciences than the ordinance of man.

Iredell walks back to his hotel desponding and miserable. His heart is in the right place, and it is reproaching him bitterly at the present moment. Yet as he enters his bedroom, and wakes up, almost with a start, to see Clare's innocent face laid in sleep upon the pillow, whilst her hand grasps the gold locket containing his hair

and portrait, which she wears night and day upon her bosom, the dark shadow rolls away, and he remembers with a thrill of joy that he has entered upon a new kingdom that is all his own.

So he kneels down gently by the bedside, and reverently kisses the loving hand that grasps the locket; and I think the action, with the feeling of gratitude that accompanies it, does Iredell more good that evening than the longest prayers would have been capable of achieving.







## CHAPTER VIII.

### "LADY BRODHURST'S OPINION."



AM perfectly aware that I am drawing the portrait of my hero with a strong hand, and presenting the weaker and less noble side of his character as freely for inspection, as I attempt to show the great and good qualities of his heart. But I do it with a purpose. The end of this story is before me as I write, and I know that if the consequences that ensue from Iredell's conduct are to be naturally worked out, the causes that produce them must be faithfully depicted.

These people are not a hero and a heroine in the general acceptation of the words. They are simply a faulty man and woman,

who nevertheless love each other sincerely, and have therefore gained the highest good this earth can afford them. But all earth's treasures are stained with rust, and there is no doubt that the effects of the evil we do in this world follow us to our lives' end. But for the present all is sunshine with Clare and Iredell, and I know not why I should thus try to jangle their wedding-bells with allusions to the future, unless it is that I see the cloud, small as a man's hand, already appearing in the horizon.

But till it overshadows their happiness let us be as unconscious of it as they are. Iredell has quite recovered his equanimity by the following morning, but he is determined not to expose himself to the chance of another encounter with the Marchesa Brindicci.

"Don't you think we've had almost enough of Florence, my darling?" he says to Clare over the breakfast-table. "Shall

we, or shall we not, move on to Paris? We have but a week left of our holiday, remember."

"I should like it above all things, Frank. The weather is so insufferably hot here. I feel as if exertion of any sort were an impossibility."

"We will start this afternoon then," says Iredell, decidedly; and nothing occurs to alter his resolution.

The Marchesa Brindicci watches for his handsome figure in the gloaming in vain, whilst they are passing a pleasant week in Paris; and then, as Iredell's leave has nearly expired, they turn their feet homewards and halt at Lady Brodhurst's town house for a few nights, en route to Woolwich.

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"And now, my dearest child, you must tell me all about it," exclaims Lady Brodhurst, as she follows her daughter into her dressing-room the first evening of her

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return. She knows they will not be disturbed by Iredell for a good half-hour at least, as she has left him comfortably disposed in the dining-room with the English papers before him, and his pipe in his hand.

"All about what?" demands Clare, with a merry laugh.

Lady Brodhurst hesitates to explain. She received Clare back that afternoon as though she had been rescued from the jaws of a ravening wolf, and examined her features anxiously, as if to search for traces of the ill-treatment she had been subjected to. But when she only saw her child looking uncommonly well and happy, a little browned perhaps from exposure to the hot sun of Italy, but beaming with smiles and looks of love and contentment, Lady Brodhurst was fain to confess that Colonel Iredell could not have yet shown himself in his true colours. She was half disposed to take umbrage at Clare's glowing accounts of

the sights she had seen and the pleasures she had enjoyed during her honeymoon, accompanied as they were by occasional glances at her husband, that said more than any words could express. But the mother consoled herself, and justified her own judgment of her son-in-law, by the belief that Clare would find something to tell her when they were alone that would throw light upon Iredell's real character.

And now the moment for confidence has come. It may seem strange that a mother should derive satisfaction from the knowledge that her only child has made a mistake in life, but although Lady Brodhurst would weep and wail at such an admission from Clare, and remind her that she had been warned of it from the beginning, she would not be displeased to find she had been in the right, and that her daughter's love for her was not threatened by so powerful a rival. For maternal love is as jealous and

(sometimes) as selfish as any other; and under any circumstances, there is no doubt, it suffers very strongly at being supplanted. And so, as Lady Brodhurst makes the above demand of Clare, her face seems to say that she fully expects to hear that her daughter is more disappointed than she would confess in Iredell's presence, with her first experience of matrimonial fetters.

But Clare's laughing rejoinder somewhat disarms her, accompanied as it is by such a happy face; and to her open question—"All about *what?*" Lady Brodhurst does not know what to reply.

"Well, where you went, and how you got on," she answers, vaguely.

"I really think you have heard all I have to tell, dear mamma," says Clare. "The places we visited you know from my letters; and I am afraid, putting travelling out of the question, we led a very idle life. It was so warm in Florence, we could not

walk till after sunset, and I never seemed to have any time to read ; indeed, it was too hot for anything but to lounge about and talk. But I was thankful for the rest. The fatigue of getting there was very great. I think we travelled rather too fast for enjoyment."

"Ah! you have been such a petted child, my darling, and never yet been called upon to take any trouble for yourself. You will find it very different now."

"O! indeed I had no trouble, mother. Frank took care of that. But no one can prevent railroad journeys being fatiguing."

"And you have been really happy! You have not missed home, and your poor old mother's care?"

"I should always miss you, dear mamma, wherever I was. One cannot forget in a moment. But I have been very happy: happier than I ever expected to be."

"Ah, well! it's early days for you to say

otherwise. Colonel Iredell was always with you, I suppose?"

"Always."

"He never left you by yourself?"

"Not unless it was to smoke a cigar, or for some such trivial reason. Mother! why do you ask me these questions?"

"Only because I feel anxious, Clare. You do not yet know what a mother's heart is, my dear. You may some day; and then you will sympathise with me."

"I always sympathise with your affection, dearest mamma. But if you think I have been the least bit disappointed with my honeymoon you are very—*very* much mistaken."

"I am only too thankful to be so, my dear."

"There is no one in the world so good as Frank," goes on Clare, with a rapidly increasing colour. "He has been as kind and tender and patient with me as if I had



been a little child instead of a grown woman. And his love, mother—I cannot speak of his love, even to you.”

“If you are contented, my darling, it is all I ask for. But the true test of a man’s disposition is not during the honeymoon. I had a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Stewart yesterday—quite unexpected. They are staying in London, at the same house as their daughter. I hope they will not call again.”

Clare knows why that hope is introduced at this particular moment as well as her mother does ; but she takes no notice of it, except by saying—

“I think I shall run down and sit a few minutes with Frank in the dining-room. He likes to have me with him whilst he is smoking his pipe.”

Lady Brodhurst immediately sees she has played a wrong card.

“No, my darling ; don’t do that,” she

replies, hurriedly. "Gentlemen like quiet, as a rule, whilst they're smoking; and it will take you some time to undress. Where's your maid?"

"I let her go to bed early. She suffered so much in crossing to-day."

"Then I must send Collins to you."

"Don't do that, mamma; I can get on very well by myself."

"My dear, I must insist upon it. She shall undress me first, if you like, and be with you directly afterwards. So, good night, my dear child. I hope you will sleep well after your long journey."

Clare holds her mother for a moment in her arms.

"Mamma! was your marriage an unhappy one?"

"My dear, no! What put such a notion in your head?"

"Only because you seem to me to run down marriage so, that I thought papa

and you could not have got on well together."

"But surely, Clare, you remember your poor papa, and can have no need to put such a question to me."

"Yes, I remember him of course, perfectly; but I never thought of such things then, and I suppose wives and husbands, as a rule, don't publish their disappointments to the world—and especially to their children."

"My dear, we were as happy as possible! Poor Sir Walter consulted my wishes in everything, and I am not aware that I ever disobeyed his. There could not have been a better assorted couple."

"I am glad of that," says Clare, gently. "Good night, dear mamma, and God bless you!" But as Lady Brodhurst leaves the room, she stands gazing after her and thinking—"O! how different from what I feel for Frank."

She muses on this subject, forgetting her intention to run downstairs and give Iredell just one more kiss in the midst of his smoking, until she is roused from her reverie by the entrance of Collins.

"Mamma in bed already?" she inquires, with a start.

"Yes, Miss—ma'am; I beg your pardon—her ladyship don't take long putting to bed nowadays; she's generally too glad to find herself there."

"Why? She's very well, isn't she, Collins? I thought she was looking remarkably blooming when I arrived this afternoon."

"O yes, her ladyship's well enough now; but she fretted sadly after you at first, Miss Clare—ma'am; I beg your pardon—and the day you left us she had a terrible attack. I'm sure she frightened me out of my life."

"A terrible attack, Collins—what can

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you mean? Why did nobody write and tell me?"

"O, her ladyship wouldn't hear of our writing to you, Miss; and it was all over in a minute, as you may say."

"Do tell me about it. How miserable I should have been if I had known."

"That's just what her ladyship thought, Miss—ma'am; I beg your pardon—but I don't know when I shall learn to call you by your proper name."

"Never mind that; tell me about mamma."

"It was just as you'd left her, Miss, and the carriage rolled away from the door. One of the young ladies that was in the bedroom gave a screech, and when I ran in there was her ladyship bent nearly double, leaning up against the bed. I went to move her, but all she could do was to wave me off with her hand. Her face had turned quite grey, Miss, like a sheet of grey paper,

and her eyes were starting out of her head. She seemed in that agony she couldn't speak; and when it passed away, she just tumbled into my arms as weak as a baby!"

"O! poor dear mamma," cries Clare, in tears. "And how long did it last, Collins? Didn't she have a doctor?"

"Well, Miss—ma'am—of course the first thing I thought of was to send for Dr. Bland; but her ladyship wouldn't hear of it. She said 'twas just a spasm, and 'twas over. So she lay still for half an hour or so, and then she went downstairs again to the company."

"And there has been no return?"

"O! no, Miss; there's been no return. And I think myself 'twas the shock of your going which gave her ladyship a turn like. But she's never spoke of it to me since."

"Poor darling mother! to think she should suffer like that whilst I was enjoying myself. Ah! Collins, we owe a great deal

to our parents, more than we can ever repay."

"That's true enough, Miss; but I wouldn't mention the subject, if I was you, to her ladyship, for I know she don't care about it's being talked about; and she particularly told me not to repeat it to you. So you wont get me into trouble, Miss Clare, will you?"

"Indeed I wont, Collins; but you must promise me, if mamma is ever ill again when I'm away, that you will send for Dr. Bland at once, without even asking her permission. You must do it on your own authority, Collins."

"I will, Miss—ma'am, I mean. And can I do anything more for you to-night, ma'am?"

"Nothing, thank you, Collins. And I think I hear the Colonel's step in the next room. Good night."

And so Clare is left for a few minutes

alone to brood over the mysterious illness of her mother, and the affection that called it forth; and the memory salves over the little unpleasant feeling which Lady Brodhurst's conversation of that evening has left behind it.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What are you going to do this evening, my Clare?" inquires Iredell a day or two afterwards, as he comes upon his wife dreaming in the dusk, in her mother's drawing-room, and wakes her with a kiss.

"Nothing, darling," she answers, as she gets possession of his hand, and keeps it.

"Well, that's satisfactory, not to say improving."

"But mamma and I have been at the Academy all the afternoon, Frank, and walked ourselves off our feet. Did you wish me to go anywhere?"

"Not at all; on the contrary, just the reverse, my child. The fact is, I met a



very old friend of mine, Wolff by name, whom I had not seen for several years, in Regent Street just now, as I was hurrying home to you, and he wants me to go and dine at the club with him this evening. But I left it an open question."

"Darling, why did you? Of course you must go and see your old friend. It's very lucky it has happened so, isn't it?"

"And my girl's sure she wont want me, then?"

"*Want you!* As if I ever wanted you," laughs Clare, trying to dissemble with her tongue, but telling the truth with her happy eyes.

"I thought as much! Tired of me already!" says Iredell, pathetically, as he goes up to his dressing-room to change his clothes.

"Where is Colonel Iredell?" demands Lady Brodhurst, as she enters the dining-room with her daughter an hour later.

It is a peculiarity of her mother's, that grates on Clare's ear every time she hears it, that she will not call Iredell by his Christian name.

"He has gone out to dine at the club with a friend," replies Clare.

Lady Brodhurst stops short on her way to her seat.

"*Gone out to dinner!*" she ejaculates, in a tone of the utmost surprise; "to a bachelors' dinner! Well, I *am* astonished."

"He could scarcely be going to any *but* a bachelors' dinner without me," laughs Clare.

"A married man should never go out to dinner at all without his wife, my dear. Bachelors' dinners, indeed—sinks of iniquity. You don't know them as I do."

"Wont the soup be cold if we don't begin dinner, mamma?" demands Mrs. Iredell, with the laudable intention of changing the conversation, at which the

footman is commencing to prick up his ears.

"O yes, certainly, my child, if you have any appetite. Well, young ladies are certainly very different now from what they used to be when I was young; everything seems changed, in fact."

"For the better, I hope, mamma."

"I don't know that, Clare. Politeness and gallantry, and all those good old virtues without which we did not consider a man to be a gentleman in those days, appear to me to have gone out of fashion altogether; and the women, instead of lamenting over their absence, rather encourage it than otherwise. It is quite incomprehensible to me."

"Mamma, were you directing all those remarks against Frank, just because he has accepted an invitation to talk over old times with a friend he has not met for years?" says Clare, as soon as they are alone with the dessert.

Her bosom has been swelling with wounded pride ever since the beginning of dinner ; but though she is a brave girl, and will not shirk the chance of defending her absent husband, she is too sensible to discuss his doings before the servants.

" Well, I was not especially alluding to Colonel Iredell, my dear, though his conduct naturally drew forth my opinion. I have no doubt he behaves quite as well as other newly-married men in the present century ; but, at the same time, it does appear strange to me to see him leaving you alone all the evening before you have been his wife for six weeks."

" How can I be alone, mother, when I have you ?"

" O, my dear, you must understand what I mean. It is not the actual *doing* it, it is the wish to do it that constitutes the offence to me."

" Well, thank Heaven, I see no offence

in it. On the contrary, I urged Frank to go."

"That is just what I say. Wives in the present day, instead of condemning such practices, smile at them."

"O, mamma! what a word—*practices*. One would really think Frank had gone out to pick pockets."

"It is what it leads to, my dear, that is so dangerous. If a married man once takes to dining with bachelors, no one can say where it will stop. The scenes they witness—the conversation they listen to—the dreadful creatures they associate with——"

"But Frank is gone to the club. There are no women there," exclaims Clare, hastily.

"But *has* he gone to the club? I know many a man who would consider himself justified in using that term wherever he might be going to dine. It is part of the

new fashion to consider that a wife has no concern with her husband's doings outside the domestic circle."

"And I don't think she has," says Clare, boldly fighting for her absent hero; "not, at all events, if she has such a man as Frank, who is all honour and goodness and uprightness, to deal with. I will never interfere with his affairs, let them be what they will. If he chooses to tell me about them, well and good; if he chooses to keep them to himself, I shall not complain."

"Well, my dear child, I hope the plan will answer, that is all," replies Lady Brodhurst. "I have no doubt Colonel Iredell is all you think him, but the best of men may be trusted too far. However, you know *one* love that will never fail for my darling."

"I know *two* loves that will never fail me," replies Clare, as she slips her hand

into that of her mother's. She cannot but feel grateful even for the jealousy which Lady Brodhurst displays with regard to her husband, but it makes her heart sore to think her mother can find no better way of showing her affection for herself than by decrying him.

Meanwhile, at that "sink of iniquity," the club, some topic in the conversation has caused Iredell to make allusion to his wife.

"And so you are really married, old boy?" says Major Wolff; "really and truly married? I can hardly believe it, Iredell. There was not much chance of it when I saw you last, five years ago."

"No, indeed! But I hadn't met *her* then."

"She should be very perfect, in order to drive the memory of the long train of beauties with whom you have played havoc out of your head. Quite sure

you've given up all that sort of thing, old fellow?"

"Quite sure!"

"And settled down into a family man—marvellous!"

"Well, I have hardly had time enough to 'settle down' yet, Wolff, but I am settling. This is the first tête-à-tête I've enjoyed with one of my own sex for six weeks. Can you realise that?"

"By Jove, no! You must have altered since the old days. I was afraid you had been rather hard hit by the Ellerman affair, when I saw you last."

"I wish you wouldn't mention it. I want to forget all my past follies now—if I can."

"I was wrong, Iredell. But don't punish me by refusing to introduce me to your wife, for I am most anxious to see the lady who has caught you at last."

"I shall be only too proud to show her



to you; but I daresay she is very different from what you imagine."

"Can't you give me a description of her?"

"No, it is beyond me. She is only a girl, Wolff—a girl of twenty—with a warm heart and open nature, but—but——"

"But—*what*, old fellow? It is a new thing to hear you stammer over anything."

"I couldn't say it to any one but you, Wolff," continues Iredell, with strange hesitation; "but you have seen me under such different circumstances, that I should like you to know that the reason I cannot bear to have the past alluded to now—is—is—that—" looking down and speaking in an awkward muffled voice,—"*my wife is all the world to me.*"

"I'm deuced glad to hear it, Iredell, and I hope she may bring you the happiness you deserve, notwithstanding the

little crop of wild oats sown and garnered. You have my heartiest congratulations, old boy. I need not ask if Mrs. Iredell is pretty, for I have too high an opinion of your taste to doubt it."

"O yes! she's well enough," laughs Iredell, with a self-conscious look that means she is as good as she can be; and then the conversation drifts into other topics, and the Service and the Government usurp the place of women.


How Lady Brodhurst's eyes would have opened if she could have overheard the disgraceful talk between this newly-married man and his wicked bachelor friend at the club—which might mean any other place.





## CHAPTER IX.

“DOWN AT WOOLWICH.”

OLONEL IREDELL and his wife have been down at Woolwich for nearly a week, during which time they have been left in peace to unpack their belongings, and set their house in order; and now they are talking together over the invitations they have received and those they intend to issue, and Frank is giving Clare his notions on society and the most effectual means of entertaining it.

It is late in the evening, and the best part of the whole day in Clare's opinion. Iredell's duty is over—so is his dinner; he has written his letters for the evening post, and is seated in an armchair with a glass of

brandy-and-water by his side, his briar-root pipe in his mouth, and a look of the most blissful contentment on his features. Clare leaves the piano, at which she has been trying new songs for the last hour, and sits down on the hearthrug at her husband's feet, resting her head upon his knee. Iredell takes his pipe from his mouth, bends down to press a smoky kiss upon her lips, and leans back in his chair again, with one hand pressed fondly on her bonnie head.

And they are supremely happy! What happiness can equal that of two people who love each other being together and alone?

"Clare, my darling," says Iredell presently, in an interval of smoking, "if there's one thing I hate above another, it's what is called a 'party.'"

"So do I, Frank."

"It is all very well for people who have a large house and plenty of money—like

your mother, for instance—to discharge their duties to society by having a big flare-up every now and then, all the details of which are devised and carried out by servants. It serves the purpose for which it was intended. But we haven't much money, and we have a very small house."

"It's a darling little house, dear," interposes Clare. "I wouldn't have it bigger for the world."

"Well, we shan't lose each other in it, Clare, shall we? But with four servants, and a limited amount of plate, you would find giving a large party in these rooms an intolerable nuisance and responsibility, with the satisfaction afterwards of feeling that none of your guests had enjoyed themselves."

"We won't give any, Frank. I would much rather not."

"Stop, dear, and listen to me. You anticipate what I was going to say. We

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shall be obliged necessarily to return the hospitalities we may receive, and owing to my position in the regiment and garrison, Clare, of course everybody of any consequence will call upon you; but what I want to say to you is, don't let us overdo it. We can dine eight very comfortably in this dining-room, and I should like every Sunday, as a regular thing, to have a dinner party of that number. I have seen the same plan carried out in other families, and it succeeded admirably. You've got an excellent cook, and I'll look after the wine, and all the rest of the business you can manage for yourself, can't you?"

"O yes, Frank, if you'll just tell me what you like best."

"Order the dinner, in fact! So I will, if my darling wishes it; and then that will leave her time (like Mrs. Crump, in 'David Copperfield') to dish up the potatoes as she would wish to see them served."

"O! Frank, you're laughing at me. I'm not quite such a fool as that."

"Let those laugh who win, my angel! I'm so happy, it will come out sometimes. But àpropos of our housekeeping, I want you to bear this in mind—*never* to place a dinner on the table that I cannot bring a friend home to. I am not extravagant in my tastes, Clare; not particularly so, I think."

"On the contrary; very moderate, *I* should say," laughs Clare, with a vivid recollection of sundry fits of impatience on the part of her lord and master over the hotel dinners during their honeymoon.

"Well, I've always been accustomed to have everything nice about me, and so have you, and there is no reason we should deny ourselves in this respect. I detest large parties, but I love to have my friends round me; I like the young fellows of the regiment to feel that mine is an open house, and I

should wish the ladies also to feel that they can come in and out as they like, and always be sure of a welcome. That is my idea of hospitality, Clare. I'm a gregarious animal, and like to see bright faces about the house. Do you agree with me?"

"Yes, Frank, if they wont break up all our happy hours together — like this one."

"My child, what an idea! The boys will be at mess in the evening, and the women have their own husbands to look after. But you understand what I mean, don't you? Never sit talking to a lady or gentleman whilst luncheon or dinner is waiting on the table. Ask them in freely. If they wont stay, it's of no consequence; if they do, mind the meal is one you are not ashamed to sit down to with them."

"I understand, dear Frank. Are there many ladies with the regiment?"

"Not so many with our own corps; but



there are several regiments stationed at Woolwich, you know. And I have received so much hospitality on all sides in my bachelor days, that I am anxious to repay it as much as lies in my power now. I am afraid we shall be condemned to accept a few invitations at first, Clare. Everybody will be anxious to see what my little girl is like."

"There were two more by this evening's post, Frank. One from General and Mrs. Nelson——"

"O! the Nelsons! We must go there. He's commanding the division. Who was the other from?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Treherne! They called yesterday, when we were out."

"We must accept that too. You'll like Mrs. Treherne, Clare. She's a most charming woman."

"One of your old loves, Frank," says Clare, archly.

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"My dear, no! She'd be horrified to hear you hint at such a thing. She thought me such a bad character, she wouldn't speak to me for a long time after I'd come to the garrison. I believe there's some queer story about their marriage. They've both been married before—so I heard—and his first wife met with her death by an accident, or something of the sort. He owns a splendid property in Wales, but they won't live there. He was in the Rifles, but sold out on his first marriage, and has regretted it ever since. He's a fine fellow—I don't know a man I like better than Treherne—and they are a most devoted couple. As for Madam, she thinks there's no one in the world like her George."

"Other wives may think the same of *their* husbands," remarks Clare, sententially.

"Ah! women are great fools when they're in love, my child."

"And what are men, pray?"

"Let us change the subject. I can't allow you to put pertinent questions to me at so early a stage of the proceedings. Don't have an 'At Home' day, Clare, whatever you do."

"Why not?"

"Because they are the greatest nuisance going. They're all the fashion in Woolwich, and indeed all over the world now, and for that reason I have always resolved my wife shouldn't have one. They are merely traps for old women and tea, and if you don't put in an appearance you are voted a skulker. How on earth is one to escape from the bores of this generation if one labels oneself — 'To be caught on such and such a day?' The practice is all very well for professional people, who have an object in giving their friends one opportunity in the week to see them on business or pleasure; but for a little lady like yourself, who has

nothing else to do from Monday till Saturday but make herself agreeable, it is better to let your acquaintances take their chance of finding you at home. And then, when you see the prime bores of Woolwich making their way up to your knocker, you can give orders to be denied to them."

"You must point me out the bores, Frank, so that I may know when to give that order."

"My dear Clare, if you can't find them out for yourself, I give you leave to entertain them. There's old Colonel Hall, for instance, who has taken part, by his own account, in every engagement that has ever been fought since the Thirty Years' War. If you have any wish to see him again after the first dose he gives you of his military experiences, you're not the woman I take you for."

"Tell me some of your own adventures," says Clare, coaxingly. "You never will

“speak of them, Frank ; and I should be so proud to hear them.”

“What do you want to hear?”

“What you did in the Crimea, and in India, and the Abyssinian war. I know you must have done no end of brave things, or you wouldn't have so many medals ; and I ought to know of them, as I'm your wife. It would seem so strange if other people spoke to me about it, and I appeared quite ignorant.”

A look of mischief sparkles from Iredell's wicked eyes as he gazes down, much amused but very lovingly, on the earnest face upturned to his.

“My darling ! I shall only be too delighted to shoulder my crutch and show how fields were won, if you care to listen. I've been a devilish fine fellow in my day, Clare, and accomplished no end of brave things. In fact, few people know what a wonderful hero I am.”

"Yes, dear!" replies Clare, timidly. She is rather startled by this new phase of Iredell's character; but a man who has achieved such great things as to be a Colonel at five-and-thirty, may be allowed to feel a little elated, she thinks, whilst alluding to his heroic actions.

"You want to know why I got my Victoria Cross, eh? There are not many fellows who wear it with such good reason as I do, Clare—remember that. Well, it was a bitter cold night, and we were encamped before Sebastopol. The snow lay feet deep upon the ground, and we had no fires and very little food. I can stand an immense deal, as you know, Clare—in fact, no man in the British army can stand more—but I do like my little bit of dinner. So I left the tent I shared with several other officers, and picked my way towards the next camp, in hopes of being able to make a purchase or an exchange with some of the

men there, in order that my brother officers and I might have some supper, for we had been fasting since morning."

"So good of you, darling, to think of them as well as yourself," says Clare, cuddling closer to her hero's knee. "So many men would have had no thought for others at such a time."

"Yes, it was an awfully plucky thing for me to do," continues Iredell, with the same look of wicked amusement in his eyes; "for there was no end of danger, you know—going from one camp to the other in that open manner. I might have been shot through the heart at any moment."

Clare shudders and presses her lips against the knee she leans upon.

"I don't suppose there was another fellow in the regiment would have done it. Well, as I went along, I saw a couple of men lying down on the snow. I walked up to them, very cautiously at first for fear

they might be playing me a trick, and then I found they were Russians from the enemy's camp—"O, Frank!" cries Clare, with dilating eyes of horror—who had had been trying to find their way back to their own men, but, being badly wounded, had sunk down and were unable to proceed."

"Poor fellows!"

"My dear! you mustn't compassionate them in that manner. It's not loyal. If they hadn't been wounded, where do you suppose your husband would have been at the present moment? Or do you think you would have had a husband at all?"

"Don't laugh, Frank! What did you do with the unfortunate creatures!"

"I drew my sword in a twinkling, and ran them both through the heart. They couldn't make the slightest resistance, you know."

"O, Frank darling! You're not in earnest?"



"*Am* I not in earnest? You ask me, Mrs. Iredell, for tales of bravery and heroism, and I wonder what you want to hear more. Having despatched the enemy, as I told you, I stripped them of all their valuables—one was an officer—and made my way back to the camp, where I related how I had been attacked by two Russian spies on their way to the English encampment, and fought and overcame them single-handed. The account of my daring reached the ears of my commanding officer, who, taking into consideration two or three other little adventures of mine, very similar in detail, recommended me for the Victoria Cross as soon as we returned to England—and that is the history of my wearing it."

Iredell, who has not regarded his wife during the latter part of this tirade of nonsense, looks round at her now, and is shocked to find that she is staring at him with eyes of real horror, whilst a deadly

pallor has overspread her countenance. He hastens to assure her he has only been joking, by indulging in a prolonged fit of laughter.

"Wasn't that a brave thing to do? Isn't my wife proud to hear of it? Doesn't she think I ought to have had two crosses instead of one?"

And then, seeing that Clare's face does not alter in expression, Iredell becomes alarmed and serious.

"My darling! you don't believe it! I was only in fun. You must know I was joking. Clare, don't look like that! you are frightening me beyond measure."

But all the answer he receives is conveyed by her throwing her arms round him and bursting into tears from sheer excitement.

"O! I didn't believe it—really I didn't believe it, Frank; but don't joke with me like that again, because I think so much of

all you have done, and—and it was such a dreadful disappointment to me.”

“What a fool I am!” ejaculates Iredell, as he soothes and caresses her. “But I never thought for a moment you would imagine me to be in earnest. Do you suppose I could speak of myself after that fashion, Clare? You must think me the most conceited ass alive. But you must get used to my nonsense, child. I’m always up to some folly or other. Who would imagine I was thirty-five?”

“I don’t believe you are more than twenty,” says Clare, smiling through her tears.

“Don’t believe it, Sweetheart, then. I would always be twenty, if I could, for your sake. And now what am I to do to make up for my thoughtlessness?”

“Tell me a real true story of yourself,” she whispers.

“Well! Once upon a time there was a

man, and he loved a girl to distraction, but he was such a fool that he made her cry when he meant to make her laugh instead."

"Don't. It is I who am the fool, and I won't be reminded of it any more. I mean a serious story of your Crimean adventures."

"No, Clare, not to-night! I've made one bad shot, and my sight's out. I vote we go to bed and sleep off the effects of it."

There is far more light and shade in Iredell's character than in that of his young wife; but for the very reason that there is no knowing, from hour to hour, in what mood she may find him, Clare believes him to be all the more delightful in her eyes. For he has never shown himself—as yet—in any but a delightful mood to her.



## CHAPTER X.

"ADDY SEYMOUR."

**C**LARE has no sooner made the acquaintance of Mrs. Treherne than she is ready to endorse her husband's opinion of her; indeed, she thinks she has never met a more engaging or attractive woman; and she likes Mr. Treherne no less than his wife. The dinner party at their house is a large and stately one, so that there is little opportunity during the progress of the meal to form an opinion of her hostess, who is seated at the further end of the table. But when the ladies assemble in the drawing-room, Mrs. Treherne seems particularly drawn towards Mrs. Iredell, and to gaze at

her with an earnest, questioning look, as though she would read what surety of happiness she has in the broad road she has just ventured upon, and which leads so many to destruction. The photographs scattered about the tables furnish, as usual in these days, the means of opening the conversation, and Clare takes up three portraits of children in a triangular frame, and fancies she traces a resemblance in them to Mrs. Treherne.

"Your little ones, I presume?" she says, inquiringly.

A shade of sadness comes suddenly over Elfrida Treherne's sweet face.

"No; they are my sister's. I have no children," she adds, after a little pause.

"Your sister does not live here, does she?"

"No; she and her husband, Mr. Cameron, live with my father, Dr. Salisbury, in Scotland. My brother-in-law is also a doctor. They have ten children."

Clare laughs.

"What a frightful number. It seems incredible to me; I am an only child. It is better to be as you are, Mrs. Treherne."

"Do you think so?" says Elfrida, quietly. She is a tall, fair woman, with large, clear grey eyes, an abundance of golden hair, and a divine smile. But her figure is thin, and her face is pale, and she looks as if she had known trouble.

"My husband and I are quite of a different opinion," she goes on, presently. "It is a real misfortune to us not to have any children, for he has a large entailed property in Wales, called Ariscedwyn, and failing his heirs, it must pass to a distant branch of the family."

"O! that quite alters the question," replies Clare; "that *is* a pity, of course. Wales is a beautiful country, is it not? I have never been there."

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"Yes, it is lovely in parts, particularly in the north, round about Ariscedwyn."

"Why don't you live at Ariscedwyn?"

"My husband went through a great deal of trouble there, and the associations of the place are unpleasant to him. Besides, he was in the army once, and has never ceased regretting he left it. So that he feels more at home in a garrison town than anywhere else; and as we are childless, it little signifies where we live. So long as we are *together*, that is all we care about."

Clare looks up at her hostess and smiles. The tone of voice in which she spoke the last sentence has established a freemasonry between the women. Mrs. Treherne sees it, and becomes more interested.

"My dear girl," she says, in a lower key, heard by none but Clare herself, "may you be as happy as George and I are; I can wish you nothing better."

At this moment their conversation is



interrupted by the entrance of several guests who have been invited to come in the evening; and from amongst which a lady, all pink puffings and little frizzled curls, rushes up to Elfrida, and shakes her vehemently by the hand.

“My *dear* Mrs. Treherne, how are you? So kind of you to ask us to come in in this friendly manner. I have been quite in a state of excitement ever since I received your invitation, and I’ve brought my music, you see, as you asked me to do; and Spooney Allingham will be here in the course of the evening—he! he! he!—poor Spooney!”

As the new-comer—who looks uncommonly like a French doll, or an animated illustration from *Le Follet*—rattles on in this lively manner, Clare cannot help observing that though her words are addressed to her hostess, her eyes are constantly turned with curious interest upon herself.

Mrs. Treherne, with other guests waiting to be attended to, tries to cut short the unnecessary parts of the communication.

"But where is Mr. Seymour? I hope he has come with you."

"Thank goodness, my dear, *no*! He has some law business or other on hand, that took him up to London yesterday for a week; been burning his fingers again, I suppose, as he usually does, meddling in things he knows nothing about. However, it's an ill wind, you know—*et cetera—et cetera—et cetera*—and I shall gain a few days' peace by it, at all events. *May I ask?—is this Mrs. Iredell?*" says the lady, in conclusion, as she turns towards Clare.

"It is," replies Mrs. Treherne, gravely.

"O! *do* introduce me."

"Mrs. Iredell, Mrs. Seymour desires an introduction to you. She has known Colonel Iredell for some time past," says Elfrida, as she turns away to greet her

other guests, leaving Mrs. Seymour with both Clare's hands rapturously clasped in her own.

"My *dear* Mrs. Iredell! *this is* a pleasure. I have been longing so to meet you. I should have called upon you directly you set foot in Woolwich, of course, but I was staying in the country with friends, and only returned home last week. But directly I heard Frank had come back——"

As her husband's name escapes the stranger's lips Clare gives a little start of surprise.

"O! you mustn't mind my calling him 'Frank,' my dear, for we've known each other for years. You heard what Mrs. Treherne said? In fact, we were brought up together, just like brother and sister; and I've always said, when dear old Frank married, I should look upon his wife as a sister of my own. I know he must have mentioned my name to you."

"I—I don't remember. I'm not quite sure," stammers Clare, who has no recollection of ever having heard it before.

"Not spoken to you of his old friend Addy Seymour? O! the naughty fellow! I'll give him a scolding for this when we meet. But there, I suppose I must forgive him. I daresay he's been so busy making love, the sly old fox, that he's forgotten all about Woolwich and its belongings. And when did you come back, dear?"

Clare cannot satisfy herself why she should shrink from this lady, and long to extricate her hand from her grasp. Mrs. Seymour is pleasant-looking and decidedly pretty, though a little *passée*; she is fashionably dressed and highly perfumed, and yet Clare feels no desire to meet her overtures of friendship half way. She is not the sort of girl to become familiar with any one upon a first acquaintance, and having been brought up so close to her mother's side,

has had neither the opportunity nor the wish to repose confidence in any other woman. She has always cherished a secret horror of that species of companion, designated by women as a "bosom friend," and though she can be open and unrestrained even to childishness with Iredell, she is almost cold in her reserve when she is brought into contact with her own sex.

But Mrs. Seymour, if she perceives the feeling she excites, takes no notice of it. On the contrary, still clasping Clare's hands in her own, she kneels before her in the most effusive manner.

"When did you come home, dear? Tell me all about it."

"About ten days ago."

"Not longer? I *am* glad. Frank will not think me so shamefully late in my congratulations on the happy event. And I have my little offering all ready too, you may be sure of that, and should have

sent it, only I wasn't sure of the address."

Clare murmurs something about her kindness in thinking of them.

"My dear girl! What an idea! As if I should let dear old Frank's wedding pass without a token that I had remembered it. But you mustn't expect great things, you know. I'm as poor as a church rat, so mine will be a very humble little souvenir, but none the less sincere I hope for that."

Mrs. Seymour's pink tulle dress over a petticoat of pink satin does not look much like the ordinary costume of a church rat, but Clare accepts her figure of speech for what it is worth, and says how gratified she is sure her husband will feel at any expression of kindness on the part of his friends.

"Your husband! How strange it seems to hear any one speak in those terms of Frank," remarks Mrs. Seymour with a sigh.

“ Ah ! well, I suppose we get used to everything in time. And I am sure the cunning fellow has made a happy choice. You are perfectly lovely, my dear, but doubtless you know all that better than I can tell you.”

Clare, who dislikes outspoken compliments from either sex, opens her eyes wide at this assertion.

“ O ! you needn’t stare so—it’s perfectly true ! And you know how to show off your beauty to the best advantage. Frank used to say I was the best dresser he knew, but he will have to change his opinion now. That salmon-coloured silk is lovely—so rich and distingué—and the style suits you to perfection. But why do you wear your dress high to the throat, my dear ? I am sure you must have a nice neck and shoulders.”

“ Colonel Iredell prefers my wearing high dresses,” replies Clare with dignity. The increasing familiarity does not please her. .

"He! he! he! he! he!" laughs Mrs. Seymour, like the bleating of a nanny-goat. "That is just like one of Frank's fidgety old ways. And you give in to him, of course? Good child! Well, perhaps it's just as well at first. In a very short time we shall have you cutting your dresses to suit yourself and not your husband. But we must be great friends, dear, I'm quite determined of that, and then if Frank tries to bully us, we'll fight him together. I don't think he'll be able to stand against the two of us, eh?"

"Mrs. Seymour!" calls the voice of Mrs. Treherne.

"What is it?" responds that lady, as she rises to her feet to confront her hostess.

"Has Spooney come?"

"Yes, Mr. Allingham has come, and we want you to sing," says Elfrida ("though I wish you wouldn't call him by that name," she adds in a low voice).



"My dear, what should I call him? He's known as Spooney throughout Woolwich. However, in deference to your wishes, he shall be Christianised. Here, Charlie! convey my music to the piano," she continues, as an ordinary-looking young man crosses the room to her bidding. In another minute she has followed him, and Clare is left in peace.

"You look tired, Mrs. Iredell. I hope you are well," says Elfrida, anxiously.

"I am not tired, thank you, Mrs. Treherne. I was only thinking," she replies.

The sound of the music brings the gentlemen up from the dining-room, and one of the first to enter is Iredell. Elfrida, who is still by the side of Clare, notes the look of expectation with which the girl listens to the footsteps on the stairs—the start of pleasure with which she welcomes her husband's entrance—the eyes of love with which she greets him, and feels glad

and thankful on her young friend's account. For, to tell the truth, from all she heard of Colonel Iredell before his marriage, she was rather disposed to tremble for the happiness of any girl with whom he should unite himself. But there seems no room for doubt here. The piano and singers are in the back drawing-room, Elfrida and Clare in the front; and as Iredell catches sight of his wife, he makes his way up to her side with an air of the supremest pride and pleasure, whilst Clare, who is almost too shy to meet his gaze in public, reddens and trembles with the delight of finding herself in his presence again.

"We have been shamefully long away," he says to his hostess, "and I was most grateful when the sound of the piano induced Treherne to make a move. Holloa! why there is Addy Seymour!" he continues, as a movement on the part of some of the guests brings the singers into view.

"Yes, they've been staying in the Isle of Wight, but returned last week. Mr. Seymour looks very ill still. I never thought Woolwich agreed with him."

"Not so well as with his wife," remarks Iredell, with a knowing glance.

"You shouldn't laugh about it, Colonel Iredell. It is shameful they don't move. The poor man is dying by inches."

"Don't they belong to the garrison?" demands Clare.

"No; they never had anything to do with it. They are rich independent people, who can go where they choose, and the life and gaiety of Woolwich suit Mrs. Seymour's tastes. But I can't think what the doctor is about to allow him to remain here."

At this juncture the duet ends, and Mrs. Seymour catches sight of Iredell. She comes towards him with a little scream and a bound.

"*Frank!*" with both hands outstretched.

Colonel Iredell rises hastily, and looks rather foolish, but takes the hands held out to him nevertheless. "O! your wife knows all about it," commences Mrs. Seymour, gushingly. "I've been talking to her for the last hour, and telling her how we've known each other, and called each other by our Christian names, since we were *so* high," intimating a distance of about two feet from the ground.

Iredell does not corroborate the statement, but he looks relieved at the openness with which she asserts it.

"That's all right! I am glad you have made the acquaintance of my wife. I need not ask how you are, you look blooming!"

"I'm well enough, thanks. I've been a little worried lately about various things, and had to run away for a breath of fresh air; but it's nothing to speak of."

"I'm sorry you've been worried. What about?"

Mrs. Seymour looks up pathetically in his face.

"Nothing of much consequence. Don't let's talk of it, please. I've such lots of things to tell you, Frank."

"I'm glad of that. I want to hear all the Woolwich scandal. Make haste and begin."

"Now fancy, Mrs. Iredell, his saying, '*make haste and begin,*' as we're standing in the middle of the room. Just like a man!"

"Let me give you a chair then," says Iredell, as he drags one forward by the side of Clare.

"No, thanks! I would rather not sit down. I shall have to sing again presently. Look at poor Spooney turning over the music. He hardly knows a soul here to speak to. Do let me introduce him to you, Frank."

"Another of your victims, I suppose——"

"Hold your tongue, sir. How dare you talk so to a married woman! Mrs. Iredell, will you be *very* angry if I take your husband away from you for a minute or two?"

Clare does not know what on earth to answer to this extraordinary question, so she stammers and blushes, and looks at Iredell until, in pity for her confusion, he settles the matter for himself.

"Mrs. Iredell will only be too proud to confide me to so able a guidance as yours, Mrs. Seymour. So pray introduce me to your friend at once."

"You wont be *jealous*?" demands Addy, as she draws Frank's hand familiarly through her arm, and throws an arch glance over his shoulder at his wife.

"Terribly," replies Clare, jestingly; but Mrs. Seymour has carried off her husband almost before she has uttered the word.

She amuses herself for the next hour

or two by talking with Mrs. Treherne and some of Frank's brother officers, but she cannot help letting her eyes wander occasionally to the further end of the back drawing-room, where Mrs. Seymour is seated on a couch close by Iredell's side, and talking to him in the most earnest and animated manner.

She would not for a moment have her husband less sought after and admired than he is, and she tries hard to interest herself in the conversation going on around her, but she cannot help wishing that Iredell were there to take his part in it. He is leaning back on the couch, and Mrs. Seymour is seated so near him, that her puffed skirts almost cover his knees, but Clare can see the energetic manner in which she taps his arm with her fan, and noting the rapidity and decision with which she is talking, wonders what she can have to say to Frank that seems of

so much importance. The restraint she is obliged to put on her own thoughts, in order to enable her to be polite and courteous to her new acquaintances, fatigues Clare; and when, after a most cordial good night from the Trehernes, and an enthusiastic one from Mrs. Seymour, she finds herself in the brougham driving home, she lays her pretty brown head down on her husband's shoulder and closes her eyes.

"Are you tired, my darling?" he inquires, unconsciously echoing Elfrida's words.

"Just a little. It has been a long evening. Frank dear, I agree with you, I don't like parties."

"Didn't Mrs. Treherne introduce some of our fellows to you? I saw Charlton there, and Lansdale, and Lord Burgess."

"O yes, and we talked a good deal together, particularly Mr. Charlton and me."



"Ah, indeed! Been flirting, have you? I see I shall have to keep a tight hand over you, madam."

"O, Frank! But he knows all the places we stayed at in Italy, and he has a copy of the Saint Sebastian we admired so much in the Florence galleries, and he wishes you had taken me to Venice. He thinks I should have liked it better than all the rest put together."

"And yet you will stand me out, Mrs. Iredell, that you've not been flirting."

"I'm sure *you're* not the one to talk about flirting," murmurs Clare in a sleepy tone, "when you've been sitting the whole evening in the back drawing-room with Mrs. Seymour."

"Poor Addy! I thought she looked dreadfully old and made-up to-night. I suppose it was the contrast with my fresh, unspoilt darling. Clare, if you ever begin

to use powder and paint, I'll have a judicial separation."

But Clare is blissfully unconscious of the threat, and with one hand tight clasped in his, has fallen contentedly asleep upon his shoulder.





## CHAPTER XI.

“JUST LIKE BROTHER AND SISTER.”

**S**HE feels almost as sleepy when she comes down to breakfast the next morning, and in answer to some jest from her husband on her languid appearance and manner, reiterates her dislike of parties and late hours.

“I never *did* like them, Frank, and I am afraid I never shall. They seem such a waste of time to me.”

“Well, you know my opinion on the matter, Clare; and as soon as these preliminary necessary inflictions are over, we will let the truth be generally known. Ten years hence, perhaps, when we have grown

utterly sick of each other's society, we may take to them again."

"Frank, do you think we shall ever grow tired of one another?" asks Clare, earnestly, as she leans over the back of her husband's chair with both arms round his neck, and her lips pressed to the crown of his handsome head.

"I hope not, darling; but there is no telling the future. I don't look like a dying man at this moment; but if you continue to throttle me with my mouth full, I shall certainly expire in another ten minutes."

"It must be so awful to be tired of one's husband," continues the girl, thoughtfully; "like being sick of oneself, and yet unable to get rid of oneself—like a living death, in fact."

"My dear child, if you go on talking in that solemn manner, I shall begin to think Mrs. Treherne's dinner has seriously dis-

agreed with you. Ring the bell, Sweet-heart, and order Richards to bring up my boots. I must be off directly after breakfast."

"Shall you be home to luncheon, Frank?"

"I hope so. And I think you had better go back to bed until I do come."

"What an idea! when I've got heaps and heaps of things to do! And if luncheon should be a little late, you wont mind?"

"Certainly not! though I am curious to hear of what this wonderful work consists, Clare."

"Unpacking our Italian purchases. Richards says the box arrived from town last evening whilst we were out."

"Well, Richards must help you then. And prepare yourself for an awful catastrophe! They'll all be smashed."

"Why should you think so?"

"Because that sort of rubbish always does smash. Alabaster and glass wont stand railway travelling. But don't look so concerned, my darling; they're easily matched in London. If they're broken, we'll buy some more."

"That wont be the same, Frank."

"Why not?"

"What! the same as these that we bought together at—at that time?"

Iredell comes and stands close beside her.

"Was it such a *very* happy time then, my Clare?"

She does not answer in so many words, but she turns and clings to him with the convulsive grasp with which a frightened child clings to its mother.

"O, Frank—dear Frank! say you will never get tired of me."

"Well, if you're a very good child, and do everything I tell you, *I wont!*" replies Iredell, who feels compelled sometimes, for

her own sake, to put a check upon the emotional side of Clare's character, and bring her back to a more practical view of her love for himself. The jesting words, with the mischievous glance that accompanies them, have the desired effect. In another moment Clare is laughing at her own folly, and as Iredell turns at the corner of the road to look back upon her, the last thing he sees is her head nodding like that of an inebriated Chinese mandarin, whilst the brightest of smiles is wreathed about her mouth.

As soon as he is out of sight, she commences the task before her, being unwilling to trust it to the hands of a servant, and anxious to get all the straw and litter of packing paper cleared away before Iredell shall return to luncheon. The huge case is brought up into the hall, and, with the help of Richards, opened and despoiled of its contents.

The damage done by travelling is not so serious as her husband prophesied it would be, and Clare is just rejoicing over the discovery that her beautiful alabaster Venus di Medici is perfect, and that the ugly little Satyr, which Frank *would* buy, has had his head knocked off in a manner that admits of almost invisible mending, when a loud double knock resounds upon the door. With a whispered injunction to Richards to say she is so busy she can see no one, she hurries into the drawing-room, wondering who amongst her new friends can have thought of calling on her so early in the morning.

"Mrs. Iredell *is* at home, madam, but she is so busy this morning unpacking, that she is sorry she can see no one," Clare hears Richards say in a methodical well-bred manner.

"O! I know she will see *me*! I'll come in and help her with her unpacking," re-



plies a shrill woman's voice. And Mrs. Seymour quietly walks past Richards and turns the handle of the drawing-room.

"O! Mrs. Seymour! I am quite ashamed you should catch me like this," exclaims Clare, who is standing with her skirts turned outward and pinned round her waist—the leaning Tower of Pisa in one hand and the headless Satyr in the other.

"My dear girl"—with a kiss on either cheek—"what does it matter? *We* are not going to stand on ceremony with each other, I hope. If you're in a muddle, so much the better; I'll come and help you out of it. Is Frank at home?"

"No," replies Clare, with a faint pink colour mounting into her cheek. "He has gone to barracks, but he'll be back to luncheon," she adds, after a pause.

"Ah! well, my dear, it's all the better he should be out of the way. Men are no use when there's anything to be done in a

house—not the slightest. You and I will manage this little matter a thousand times better without him."

All this time Mrs. Seymour has been coolly taking off her hat, mantle and gloves, without the slightest encouragement to do so, and laying them upon a couch.

"Your maid may as well take these things out of the way of the dust," she remarks. "And now, let me see; what are you unpacking? Alabaster models! How lovely! Is that the Tower of Pisa? How I wish Frank had brought me one. The wretch knows how often I expressed a wish for it."

"I am sure if he had remembered it, Mrs. Seymour, he would," says Clare.

"Now, you mustn't call me Mrs. Seymour, dear; you must call me Addy. Remember, I am just like Frank's sister. Why, he *lived* at our house last year, and we should have no more thought of giving a

party without him, than of flying. Everybody in Woolwich knows how intimate we were."

"When did you first know him—when you were a little child?" asks Mrs. Iredell.

"O! my dear, I really can't remember—it's so long ago. The fact is, I've known him always."

"It's so strange he never mentioned you to me!" says Clare, musingly.

"Well, I feel I have a crow to pluck with him for that too. But men are curious animals, my dear. You never know what they'd be at. Perhaps he wished to surprise you—perhaps he forgot all about it."

"I can hardly believe that," says Clare, laughing.

"N'importe! Let us leave speculation, and get to work."

"But I don't like to trouble you."

"It's no trouble. I'm an active creature, and always doing something from morning

to night. Give me those vases, Richards; and have you got such a thing in the house as a feather brush? You mustn't dust these fragile things with any sort of cloth. O! you young housekeepers! how many things you have to learn before you get settled and comfortable. But anything *I* can do, my dear, in helping you to get to rights, you may be sure I will—and with the greatest pleasure. If Frank hasn't told you that already, he's a Goth."

Thus talking, dusting, and arranging, Mrs. Seymour rattles on and makes herself perfectly at home. Clare does not dislike the companionship. It is true that the sound of her husband's Christian name leaving Addy's lips so constantly grates upon her ear; but mentally she takes herself to task for minding such a trifle, and keeps on asking her heart what difference it can make. And what with work and the relation of various items of

military scandal, interlarded with one or two slightly equivocal stories, whispered in the intervals of Richards's absence, and at which Clare cannot help laughing, the time goes by so quickly that both the ladies are astonished to find it is close upon two o'clock.

Then Clare remembers her husband's injunction about never allowing their guests to leave the house at meal time, and begs Mrs. Seymour to stay to luncheon.

"We shall just have time to run upstairs and make ourselves tidy before Frank comes. I expect him every minute now."

Mrs. Seymour pretends to demur.

"Well, I should have been delighted, as you may suppose, but I told Spooney Allingham to call for me here at two, and take me home to my own meal; and I can't very well send him adrift again, alone and fasting, can I?"

"But can't Mr. Sp—— I mean Mr.

Allingham, stay and take luncheon with us also?" demands Clare.

"I have no doubt he will, since you are so good as to ask him. Richards," continues Mrs. Seymour, calling over the banisters as she ascends the staircase with her hostess, "when Mr. Allingham arrives show him into the drawing-room, and say I shall be down in a minute."

Mrs. Iredell thinks it very kind of Mrs. Seymour to save her the trouble of giving orders in her own house, but nevertheless she is not quite sure that she likes it.

When they enter the sitting-room again, they find both the gentlemen there, Iredell looking—or so his wife fancies—not quite so pleased at the sudden irruption on his household as she anticipated he would.

"So you see, Frank, here I am," cries Mrs. Seymour, as they encounter one another.

"So I perceive," he answers; adding,

after a little, "delighted at the fact, I'm sure."

"You old humbug! I don't believe you're delighted a bit. But we're not going to stand any of your nonsense, sir! Clare and I have entered into a compact to stand by one another, and bully you till you dare not say your life's your own—haven't we, dear?"

"I think you are drawing a little on your imagination," says Clare, smiling.

"O, you traitor! Do you mean to say you are going over to the enemy already? Spooney, I can't stand that! You and I will have to elope together if this goes on much longer. Two against one is not fair. When are we going to have luncheon?"

"It is ready now," replies Iredell, as he offers his arm to conduct her into the next room.

Clare is secretly delighted to think that on this, the very first day she has been

enabled to put her husband's wishes with regard to open hospitality into effect, the luncheon should be as nice a one as she has seen upon the table yet.

Mrs. Seymour is vehement in her praise of every dish of which she partakes; and the young hostess is thinking so much of the praises she shall receive for her house-keeping, as soon as they are alone again, that she does not perceive that Iredell's spirits are much below their usual par. Indeed, it is not until their noisy guest and her cavalier have at last taken their departure, and her husband has thrown himself into an armchair, that Clare finds out that he is silent and abstracted, and fears he may be tired.

"Has anything gone wrong in the regiment to-day, darling?" she inquires, timidly, when she has sat by his side for at least ten minutes without his speaking.

"No! Why do you ask?"



"Only because you seem out of sorts."

"I'm all right—only a little worried."

"Have *I* worried you, Frank?" says Clare, as she kneels beside him.

"*You*, my precious? No! But why did you ask that woman here, Clare?"

"Mrs. Seymour! I didn't ask her; she came of her own accord."

"But surely you invited her to luncheon?"

"When I found it was lunch time, I asked her to stay, because of what you told me the other day, about never allowing a friend to leave the house at those times; but she had been here hours before."

"I wish you hadn't asked her; she's not a friend."

"But, Frank, she says she's known you from a little child."

"She'd be very sorry to have to substantiate the fact, if the production of dates were a necessary part of the assertion."

"She says you have always been as intimate as brother and sister (Iredell puts in a short laugh here by way of parenthesis), and that last year you almost lived at their house. Is that true?"

"O yes, it's true. I have been a very intimate friend of hers, but that is no reason I should wish her to be an intimate friend of yours."

"Frank! she *will* be. She called me by my name, and kissed me directly we met. I don't like it; but what can I do? I cannot be rude to her."

"You must show her you don't like visits at untoward times. I wont have her running in here at all hours, nor bringing her men friends with her. Neither her conversation nor her manners are what I should wish you to copy. I wont have you calling men by their proper names."

"I never have, dearest."

"No; and by Jove you never *shall*,"

cries Iredell, in the angriest voice Clare has ever heard him use to her.

She creeps closer to his side, and whispers, "What shall I do?"

"I don't know what you *can* do," he replies, with an air of perplexity. "You must not offend her, but if she goes on as she has begun to-day, she may take up her residence here in another month. But don't look vexed, Clare; perhaps it may not prove so bad as I anticipate. We will let things go on quietly for a few weeks, and then if Addy Seymour gives us too much of her company we will devise some plan to let her know it. Go and put on your hat, Sweetheart, and come out for a walk with me. There's that nondescript animal you call a dog wagging his fluffy tail off in his endeavours to attract your notice, and remind you he has had no fresh air for a week. Let us go out and blow away the emembrance of the fair Addy, if we can."

But Frank is not quite himself during that walk, even though Mrs. Seymour's name is not again mentioned between them.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a hard task that Iredell has set his young wife—that of repulsing the forced intimacy of a woman so many years older than herself. It is difficult enough for one who has moved in society for many years to repel intrusion with a firm, yet courteous hand; but for a young girl just entering upon social life it is almost impossible. Consequently, Mrs. Seymour continues to run in and out of Colonel Iredell's house just as she likes; and Clare feels as if there were no alternative between receiving her as a friend, or telling her of Frank's wishes to her face. The wedding present, a frosted silver cake-basket, arrives at the house also, and forms another obstacle to hinting that the recipients see too much of the donor.

And time goes on, and Addy appears again and again, generally about lunch or dinner time, when she knows the master of the house is expected home; often in the evening, when she disturbs the *têtes-à-tête* that Clare takes so much pleasure in. Till at last Iredell has become tired of giving his wife advice on the subject, and submits to the infliction without further remonstrance, except such as is conveyed by an occasional hasty retreat to his sanctum, on the pretence of business with some brother officer, as an excuse for leaving the women by themselves. And to Clare, who loves her husband's company above all other, and cannot accept Addy Seymour's lively talking and singing as an able substitute, these mysterious and generally sudden disappearances become a real grievance.

Sometimes, too, she wonders at them, and the cause of Frank's dislike to Mrs. Seymour, of whose beauty and ability to please

there can be no question. That he does dislike her, however, Clare has no doubt; and she especially notes one singular circumstance—that Iredell appears determined never to spend one moment alone in a room with their unwelcome acquaintance. If by chance his wife leaves him so, he is sure to make some excuse to run after her; till Clare, with proud pleasure in her eyes, laughs at him for a big baby, who is unable to exist one minute without her protection. But she never has the faintest inkling that her jesting accusation is the truth.

One day, however, two or three months after they have been settled in Woolwich, Iredell having a large amount of writing on hand, has shut himself up in the study, and sent Clare out for a drive by herself. He is always exceedingly particular that, however his own duties may detain him at home, she shall have plenty of fresh air and exercise. So Sir Daddle Daddles—as she

childishly calls her little rough-haired terrier—and she are quietly rolling together over a road on the outskirts of the town; whilst Iredell is seated in the study with his head bent over a pile of official papers. He is so occupied that he hardly notices a knock at the hall-door; but he has given orders not to be disturbed, and has no fear of interruption. However, like the good St. Kevin of blessed memory, Iredell little knows what “the wily sex can do.” His attention is presently distracted by an altercation going on in the hall, where Richards, faithful to his duty, is trying hard to prevent Mrs. Seymour pushing herself past the foot he has resolutely planted on the threshold. The words become so quarrelsome, and the tone of Richards’s voice sounds so much as if he were forgetting his place, that Iredell feels compelled at last to rise and see what is the matter. Directly the master appears the

servant retires, and he is left to fight the battle by himself.

"My wife is out," he says, in explanation to Mrs. Seymour.

"But it's *you* I want to see, Frank. Do let me come in. I have something of great importance to say to you."

"I am *very* busy," he pleads. "I hardly know how I shall get through my work as it is."

"I won't keep you more than a minute. It was Henry sent me up here to see you."

"For a minute, then," says Iredell, as he opens the drawing-room door.

But Addy Seymour passes on to the study.

"We shall be much more comfortable here," she says, confidently; "and I don't want to be interrupted." And he has no alternative but to follow her.

"And now what is it Seymour wants of



me?" says Iredell, as they are seated either side of the writing-table.

"O, Frank! do you really believe that Henry sent me here? Of course not; but the temptation to see you alone for a few minutes was too great to be resisted. It is such an age since we have had one of our dear, cozy old talks together."

Iredell begins to look foolish, and play with a paper-knife. Perhaps the most embarrassing position in the world for a man is to be brought face to face, and alone, with an old flame whom he has never quarrelled with, but only completely forgotten.

"You remember the old days, dear, don't you?" says Mrs. Seymour, softly.

"Yes; of course I do. A man does not forget so easily as all that. But, under the circumstances, don't you think the mention of them is better avoided, Addy?"

"Ah! that's right. Call me 'Addy!' I

cannot tell you how your formal greetings have jarred upon my ear. Why should we ignore what *has* been, Frank? Is the fact of your marriage to separate us completely?"

"I don't see that it has. I should be sorry to believe it would. But there is no doubt that our former intimacy *rather* exceeded the bounds of friendship, Addy."

"You loved me, Frank! say, you loved me!" she urges.

Now, as it happens, Frank did *not* love her in those former days. He had only recouped himself in return for the very evident admiration Mrs. Seymour had displayed for him, by indulging in a flirtation with her, somewhat mutually detrimental to their characters for prudence. But his heart had never been the least implicated in the affair; and he will not tell a falsehood about it now, even to avoid the scene which he foresees in prospect for him.

"We flirted a great deal more than we ought to have done," he continues. "It was all my fault, I know, and I have been very sorry for it since. But the past cannot be recalled, and the best thing we can do is to forget it."

"Ah, Frank! *you* may find it very easy to forget."

"I wish I could, Addy. But every time you enter this house you are a reproach to me."

"Do you wish me not to come here, then?"

"I could wish you did not come quite so often. No; don't stop me, Addy. It is best, since we are on the subject, that I should speak openly. I love my wife truly, and I am most anxious that none of my former follies should ever crop up to disturb the peace of her married life. And for that reason I think you are here oftener than is prudent for either of us."

"You call it a folly—and it has blasted my whole life!" cries Mrs. Seymour, in tears.

"No, Addy; pray don't say that. A few kisses and love speeches are not seriously damaging to a woman's reputation, after all. And if the Woolwich tongues *did* wag a little more than was needful about us, my marriage must have put a stop to them. Don't let me imagine that I have done you any real harm by my thoughtlessness."

"I wasn't alluding to what people said of us; I was speaking of my own heart," says Addy.

Iredell is silent. This is an insinuation to which he feels quite unable to reply. Had this woman professed complete indifference to his marriage, his vanity would have suffered mortification; and yet he dares not let her see that her acknowledgment flatters him. He is pleased, and he is not pleased. He has not the slightest feeling left regarding Addy Seymour; but her regret for his

loss does not strike him as unnatural, and disposes him to pity her if he cannot entertain a warmer sentiment.

“My dear friend,” he says—“I may call you my friend, may I not Addy?—let us try and look at this matter in a reasonable light. You know that it was impossible we should ever have been more to one another than we were, and our intimacy was doing us both harm instead of good. You should rejoice then, instead of lament, over a marriage which permits me to be a friend to you without the fear of bringing scandal on your name.”

“But you say I mustn’t come here,” exclaims Mrs. Seymour.

Iredell feels caught, and stammers—

“O! I didn’t mean altogether—I meant—I meant—well, the plain fact is, that if you enjoy Clare’s society and mine, I see no earthly reason why you shouldn’t come as often as you please.”

"Haven't I always behaved cordially to your wife, Frank?"

"Always." ("A little too much so," he might add, but does not.)

"And have I ever spoken to you of, or even hinted at, my own unhappiness until to day? But my heart was bursting, and I felt that I must speak."

"And having spoken, we will drop the subject henceforward. Is that a bargain?"

"But you will not forget me, Frank? You will let me know sometimes, just by a word or a look, that the past is not entirely as if it had never been! You will treat me really as if I were your sister, and show me a little affection in return for all I have felt—and feel—for you."

She has risen from her chair and crossed over to his, and now she stands before him with streaming eyes fixed upon his own.

"I shall never forget, nor cease to be grateful for your affection, Addy."

Mrs. Seymour bends and kisses him.

"I must kiss you once, as I used of old. You said yourself that kisses were no harm, Frank, and nothing can ever make us indifferent to each other—can it now?"

"Certainly not! but you will be a good girl, and let the world forget our flirtation as soon as it can. *We* can do as we choose about remembering, but we owe it to our relative positions to afford no more food for scandal. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly! and I will be discretion itself. O! I am so much happier now that we understand each other. You will be my true friend, Frank—I feel that—and everything will go right for the future."

Frank is not half so easy on this score as she is. The scene which has just transpired is the last thing on earth he wished to happen. He had hoped that Mrs. Seymour, for both their sakes, would have had the good sense to let by-gones be

by-gones, and he foresees trouble arising in the future from this new bond of friendship. He knows he is not good at resisting the temptations thrown in his way by the fairer sex; and of all temptations the most difficult for a man to repel are those presented to him by a woman with whom he has once been on terms of intimacy. It is not like breaking new ground; it seems so natural to renew former relations, so ungrateful to be unmindful of them; in short, the best plan he can pursue under the circumstances, if he wishes to conquer, is to run away. But Iredell has just, by a slip of the tongue, forged new fetters for himself. He is unpleasantly conscious of the fact as Mrs. Seymour addresses him.

"I hope so, most earnestly," he answers; and then, as the knocker sounds on the hall door, he continues, almost in a breath, "Here is my wife!"



Mrs. Seymour is in her arm-chair in a twinkling, with dry eyes and a smiling countenance, but she cannot conceal the fact that she is sitting tête-à-tête with Colonel Iredell.

Clare comes straight from the carriage to the study door and peeps in. She looks so sweet and fresh and girlish as she stands upon the threshold, with her fair face blooming from the exercise, and Sir Daddle Daddles in her arms, that she forms a striking contrast to the world-worn woman who confronts her—as striking a contrast, her husband thinks, as her pure honest love does to the meretricious article Addy Seymour would barter for it if she could. He advances to meet her and take her in his arms, rather more ostentatiously than is his wont before others, because his conscience is reproaching him for the interview he has just held.

“My own darling!” he exclaims, as he

kisses her, and Mrs. Seymour winces at the words and action.

"Is that Mrs. Seymour?" cries Clare, in innocent surprise. "I thought you were so busy, Frank."

"So I am, dear, but Mrs. Seymour had some business of importance to consult me upon—something that concerns her husband, Clare."

"And have you settled it?"

"Yes, we have settled it," replies Iredell, in a tone that sounds significant to one of his listeners, "and to our mutual satisfaction. And now I must turn both of you ladies out of my study, and get to work in real earnest."

He kisses his wife again as he speaks, and returns to his writing-table without so much as another look at Mrs. Seymour, who feels somehow as she follows Clare as if her interview with Iredell had not been quite so successful as it seemed five minutes before.

"I went out because I knew Frank had so much work to finish, and I gave orders he was not to be disturbed on any account," remarks Mrs. Iredell, rather reproachfully to her friend as they enter the drawing-room together.

"O yes! dear, so I was told, but then Frank and I are such *very old* friends, you know, and so thoroughly understand each other, and I felt his advice would be so much more valuable to me than that of any one else, that I took the privilege of intimacy you know, and insisted upon seeing him. I hope my visit will make no palpable difference to his work. But we have always been like brother and sister, you know——"

"O yes! I know all that," interrupts Clare. She has already begun to be a little tired of hearing the fact.



## CHAPTER XII.

“BLUE EYES OR BROWN.”

**F**REDELL does not feel quite easy as he meets his wife at the dinner-table that evening. He is sure she will make some further allusion to Mrs. Seymour, and does not know how he shall parry it. He would like to tell her the whole truth; but a woman's honour is sacred with him. So he attempts by a little extra attention, honestly bestowed and warmly accepted, to stave off the unlucky inquiry; but all he can accomplish is to postpone it till the dessert is before them. As soon as ever the servants have quitted the room, Clare commences.

“Why did you let Richards admit Mrs.

Seymour this afternoon, Frank? It was too bad of her forcing her way in after that fashion, and when you had particularly given orders not to be disturbed."

"I assure you it annoyed me, darling. I shall have to return to my work again as soon as dinner is finished in consequence."

"But why did you let her stay? You sent me out driving on purpose that you might be alone. Or at least you said so."

"And do you doubt me, Clare?"

"O no! but Mrs. Seymour seems to imagine she can enter and leave the house just as she chooses, without so much as ascertaining if we want her company."

"I don't think she will be here so often for the future, dear. I gave her a pretty strong hint on the subject. But she is very sensitive, and I didn't like to hurt her feelings by a direct denial."

"What was her business with you, Frank?"

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"That I can't tell you, Clare."

"I don't think a woman has any right to have secrets with a married man that he can't tell his wife. Do you?"

"Yes, I do—in some instances, that is to say. You mustn't forget that Addy Seymour and I are very old friends."

"Old flirts, you mean!" says Clare, quite snappishly.

"Clare!"

"O, darling! I oughtn't to have said that. I had no right to say it. But she does worry me so, always talking about being your sister, and all that rubbish!"

"It *is* rubbish! Wont you believe it on your husband's authority?"

"Then why do you let her say it, Frank?"

"Wiser men than myself have been unable to dam the current of a woman's tongue, Clare! But if you are going to make me and yourself miserable on account

of Mrs. Seymour's folly, tell me so at once, and she darkens these doors no more."

"How could you prevent it?"

"By simply telling her that my wife does not love me sufficiently to trust me; and therefore it is my duty to give her no further cause for suspicion."

"Frank, darling! you don't believe that?"

"I don't want to believe it, Clare. But what else can I think from your words?"

The girl leaves her place and crosses to his, and kneels down beside him and looks penitent, as all women do who offend Iredell; for here is a man for their master, and they know it.

"Kiss me, dear Frank!"

He not only kisses her—he holds her to him passionately.

"My child, when we started on life's journey together, we agreed to trust each other. I trust you implicitly: cannot you do the same by me? It is true that you

have heard all sorts of stories about my former life, many of which are true, and there is an old proverb—'Give a dog an ill name, and hang him ;' but all I can say is, that to whomsoever the past may have belonged, the present is all your own. Will not that assurance content you?"

She looks as though it contented her, as she clings to him and feels supremely happy. And when Iredell has gone back to finish the writing that Mrs. Seymour interrupted, she sits down to her needle-work, and, going over quietly what has passed, takes herself severely to task for the part she has played in the little unpleasantness of the day.

"How very foolish I am," she thinks, "to let such a trifle ruffle, even in the slightest degree, the beautiful love that Frank and I bear each other. For it is beautiful! I do not believe that any man and woman in the world ever cared for one



another as we do. When does he ever thwart me, even by a look? When has he ever denied me anything, or failed to show me the tenderest love and devotion? And didn't I give him leave to flirt even before I married him, and assure him I would never be jealous, or suspicious, or carping, as some wives are? And yet, because that silly, painted-up woman (Frank called her a Jezebel to me straight out the other day) thrusts herself into his study, and insists upon telling him her business (and it was her husband's business, after all, Frank said so), I choose to get jealous! Yes; I *was* jealous—horribly so, just for a minute or two—and sulk with my own darling, and make him look grave with me. O! I am a wretch! I am not worthy to be his wife! I used to think so long ago, before it came to pass; but now I seem to take everything as though it were my right, and no particular good fortune, after all.

I am wicked and ungrateful. I don't deserve that he should love me the least bit. He ought to have married some clever, sensible woman, and not a silly girl like me! I shall tell him so as soon as ever he comes in."

And naturally the upshot of Clare carrying her resolution into effect is, that one of the tenderest love scenes in which she has ever played a part takes place in the drawing-room as soon as Iredell makes his reappearance there.

For the next few days she lives in a seventh heaven of delighted expectation, for Lady Brodhurst is coming down to pay her first visit to Woolwich, and Clare is in a flutter of importance and anxiety that her mother should view all the enchantments of her new home with the same eyes that she does. She has no need to be nervous on the subject, for although the house is small, it is well built and

designed, and fitted up with the greatest luxury. But Lady Brodhurst, who possesses an income of ten thousand a year, and has been used to huge *salons* and bed-rooms of the size of barracks, looks rather disparagingly round the limited area of Clare's drawing-room, as she is first ushered into it. She has arrived, accompanied by her maid and man servant, and although it is summer weather, and the windows and doors are all wide open, she seems to fill up the little room altogether, as, enveloped by frills and furbelows and laces, she sinks down on the sofa, exhausted by the heat and fatigue of travelling, and clasps Clare in her maternal arms.

"My dear child," are her first words, "how thin and pale you look!"

The poor child, who neither is nor feels ill, laughs out at the assertion, and denies it vehemently.

"If I look pale, mamma, it must be on

account of the heat. It has been very warm for the last few days, has it not?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear, and I am sure you must feel it down here."

"Not so much as you do in London, mamma."

"Perhaps not in the atmosphere exactly, but then the size of the rooms, my dear, and all that, makes an immense difference. Collins, fetch me the eau-de-cologne and fan out of my travelling-bag. Now, take care how you move about. Don't knock down any of Mrs. Iredell's pretty things. You have this room too crowded with ornaments, Clare. There is no space to turn in."

Clare looks round her pretty nest wistfully.

"Frank calls it my museum," she says, "and often threatens to have a sale here. But they're not common ornaments, mother. Half of them are what he brought

from India and Abyssinia, and other places he has been to. Isn't this curious?" continues Clare, proudly displaying a black enamel and gold cross, with the Russian Emblem in diamonds on it, which she wears round her throat. "Frank took this himself from the body of a Russian officer in the Crimean war. Look, it has 'Marie' engraved on the back. I suppose it was a love-token, poor fellow! I think it is such an interesting and valuable relic, I wouldn't part with it for worlds."

"My dear child," says Lady Brodhurst, as she cursorily glances at the ornament her daughter holds out for her inspection, "of course you can attach any fanciful value to the thing you choose, but as for the cross itself, it is one of the commonest patterns possible. There were heaps of them made in London after the Crimean war. But you are too young to remember it."

Clare replaces the cross on her bosom with the sensation of having been snubbed. 'There is nothing in Lady Brodhurst's words positively to take offence at, but they leave an unpleasant feeling behind them, and make the girl wish she had kept her cross and her ideas to herself.

"And, by the way, where is Colonel Iredell?" demands her mother, as an after-thought.

"He will be in soon, I hope, dear mamma. He is president of a court martial to-day, and one never can tell on such occasions how long he may be detained. But will you not come upstairs and see your bedroom?"

Lady Brodhurst rises with an effort, and permits herself to be conducted to the upper storey. She is a fine woman, still handsome and young-looking, but too stout for the health of middle age. As she reaches the upper landing, she stops for a moment and places

her hand upon her side, and Clare is startled to see how pale she has suddenly become.

"Dearest mamma, are you ill?"

Lady Brodhurst does not speak for a minute; when she does, it is slowly and with an effort.

"No, my dear, no! It is nothing—only the stairs; but ring for Collins."

Collins enters the bedroom, glances at her mistress, and immediately produces a small mahogany case, with a mysterious brass and wire apparatus inside the lid. Clare, who has never seen such a thing before, is all amazement.

"What is that for?" she exclaims.

"Only a galvanic battery, ma'am. Dr. Bland has ordered her ladyship to use it when she feels a sinking like. It restores the haction."

"Action of what?" asks Clare.

Lady Brodhurst looks at her servant warningly.

"Of the *muscles*, ma'am," replies Collins, discreetly. "Her ladyship's getting a bit stout, you see, and the stairs try her. She'll be all right in a minute."

And Clare, though utterly incapable of understanding why the use of a galvanic battery should be able to bring back the colour to her mother's cheek, and the strength to her voice, is too happy to see them return to quarrel with the means by which they come.

"That's all right; her ladyship's herself again now," says Collins, as Lady Brodhurst rises from her chair, and walks to the looking-glass; and she packs up the mahogany box and places it on the chest of drawers.

"I hope you will like your room, dear mamma, and find it comfortable," says Clare, timidly.

"Yes, my darling, I am sure of that; but I should like to have Collins to sleep



near me. I am sometimes taken a little faint these hot nights, and want assistance."

"O, that is easily arranged. I will have a sofa bed put in that corner at once. Anything else, mamma?"

"No, dear, thank you," replies Lady Brodhurst, as she takes a survey of the apartment. "What pretty furniture," she remarks, approvingly.

Clare laughs.

"Is it not? It is all old brass and walnut-wood. You will never guess where it came from, mamma."

"From where, my dear?"

"Frank's bachelor room. Wasn't he a luxurious fellow? It is the handsomest bedroom furniture we have, and that is why I put it in the spare room. Mine is furnished with pine, in the modern fashion—very nice and pretty, but not half so good. It was only yesterday that I turned out a lot of Frank's old love-letters from that

bureau, and took them down to his study. The top drawer was crammed full of them."

"I hope you did not see anything to annoy you in them, my child?"

"Mamma, do you think I could have been so dishonourable as to look at them?"

"I don't think, as a rule, that it would be considered dishonourable for a wife to look at her husband's papers. But I am sure it is better she should not, especially with a man who has married late in life, and has the credit of not having led a particularly sober career previously."

Clare's loyal blood rushes in a torrent to her burning cheeks; but she answers quietly, though with a slight tremble in her voice—

"I should consider it dishonourable under any circumstances. Even if Frank were—were *dead*, I would never look at his papers."

"You are too scrupulous, my darling;

but it is a fault on the right side. Colonel Iredell will respect you all the more for it. He will feel he can trust his valuables in your hands."

"He didn't consider them valuables; he threw them all into the fire then and there!"

"The wisest thing he could do, dear. Burnt papers, like dead men, tell no tales."

"I don't think these were of any importance," continues Clare, feeling more and more vexed, she can hardly tell why; "for Frank said, 'Why not leave them there?' Until I explained that I wanted to clear the chest of drawers for you."

"My dear Clare," says Lady Brodhurst, seriously, "a man of Colonel Iredell's age would hardly be so imprudent as to leave any papers of *real* importance unburned until after his marriage. These were, as you say, doubtless of little consequence, or he would scarcely have allowed you access

to them. But they are just as well in the fire. I am no advocate for keeping letters under any circumstances."

"I have every one that Frank has ever written to me," says Clare, in a voice of triumph, "from the first note he wrote, to accept our invitation to dinner, to the last dear letter I received from him, two days before our marriage; and I will never part with them. I mean them to be buried with me."

Lady Brodhurst turns the same kind of look upon her daughter that she used to do in the days of her engagement, when Clare had given vent to rather stronger sentiments than usual on the subject of her attachment—a look half questioning, half pitiful—a very uncomfortable look to encounter from any one we trust in reference to any one we love.

"Keep them, dear child," she says, presently; "and the worst wish I have for you

is, that you may never change your mind upon the subject."

"I know that my happiness is your first thought, dearest mother," replies Clare; and they are in the midst of the fond embrace that follows, when the hall door opens and shuts.

"There is Frank," cries Clare, as the deep voice she loves best in the world sounds upon her ear—and Lady Brodhurst guesses by the tremor that runs through her child's frame how powerfully it affects her—"that is his step, mother—that is his voice." And in another moment she has flown upon the landing.

"Frank, darling! mamma has come!"

"So I perceive from the boxes in the hall."

"They shall be cleared away directly. Come up and see her."

"As soon as I have changed my clothes."

"No! no!—now, Frank—just as you

are. I want mamma to see you in your uniform," says Clare, in a flutter of pride at her hero's appearance.

"Goose!" cries Iredell; but he mounts the staircase notwithstanding, and comes smiling in at the open bedroom door, with an arm thrown round his wife's waist. They make a beautiful picture as they stand together on the threshold—he, with his noble head and figure and martial dress; and she, with her sweet girlish face just resting on his shoulder, and her adoring eyes thrown upward. It is a sight of which any mother might be proud, for which any mother might be grateful; and Lady Brodhurst, as she looks upon them, believes for the moment that she is both.

A few friends have been asked to dinner that evening in honour of the mother-in-law's arrival. Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, with Mr. Charlton and Lord Burgess, both of whom are in Iredell's corps. His lordship,

a handsome young man of about five-and-twenty, with wide, open blue eyes, and a fair, long beard, which he is much in the habit of caressing, has already evinced himself an ardent admirer of Clare's, and seems unable to take his eyes off her, as she sits at the head of the table, doing the honours with blushing diffidence.

Lady Brodhurst is good enough to approve of her son-in-law's guests. She can find no fault with the perfect breeding of the Trehernes or the courteous deference of young Charlton. Even the aristocratic tomfooleries of my Lord Burgess elicit no higher censure from her lips than what is conveyed by a reproving smile. She was prepared to find the *intimes* of military life a trifle rougher, even perhaps a trifle faster, than those she has been accustomed to meet in her more secluded sphere of society. She is agreeably disappointed. Not a slang word or allusion—so unfortunately common

in these days of mixture of classes and opinions—escapes the lips of any of the ladies or gentlemen round Colonel Iredell's table. The conversation, like the dinner, is conducted in the most select style, and by the time the three ladies retire to the drawing-room, Lady Brodhurst is in her most beaming temper.

"I cannot tell you what a comfort it is to me, Mrs. Treherne," she remarks confidentially to Elfrida, "to find my dear child has such a friend as yourself in Woolwich. You will excuse my mentioning it, I hope, but military ladies as a rule are not considered, as doubtless you have heard, the *crème de la crème* of society."

"Well, I am not a 'military lady,'" replies Elfrida, laughing, "so the shaft does not hit me. But you are right, Lady Brodhurst, in thinking that women who have been knocked about from one garrison town to another, do deteriorate in speech



and manner. They are so frequently thrown upon the society of men alone for companionship, that they are apt to imbibe their freedom of habit and expression. But I hope these are the exceptions and not the rule. At all events, there are not many such in Woolwich.

Clare glances at Elfrida quickly. It is on the tip of her tongue to quote Mrs. Seymour as an example of the women they speak of, but she checks herself. She has already begun to wish, though she has but little hope of it, that that lady and her mother may, by some happy accident, not be brought in contact with each other.

"I am very glad to hear it," replies Lady Brodhurst. "My daughter's marriage with a military man was naturally a source of regret to me——"

"O! come, Lady Brodhurst! I don't think I must let you say anything about that," interrupts Mrs. Treherne; "for though

my husband is not in the army now, he *was* before I married him, and he considers it the very finest profession in all the world."

"I have nothing to say against *the army*, my dear Mrs. Treherne. On the contrary, no one thinks more highly of our soldiers than I do; but Clare should have looked higher than a professional man at all."

"If he had been higher than Frank, he would have been out of sight altogether," says Clare, archly, but with a flushed face withal.

"Ah! my darling, it's all very well to turn it into a joke; but parting with my only child, to be ordered off, the next day perhaps, Heaven only knows where, has been no joke to me."

"I don't think there is much fear of Colonel Iredell's battery being ordered off anywhere," says Elfrida, who has had too much real trouble in her life to have any sympathy with sentimentality; "and if there

were, he is hardly likely to take his wife with him."

"But I wouldn't stay behind," cries Clare, confidently.

"Brava!" says Elfrida.

"There, Mrs. Treherne, you see how it is," interposes Lady Brodhurst. "She has been married five months, and she would leave her mother to-morrow to follow her husband."

"And so she should, Lady Brodhurst. It is a wife's duty."

"Mamma darling! you know my love for you can never be less, but—but——"

"But Colonel Iredell is all the world to you, and, by comparison, *I* am nothing."

The daughter is beginning to frame some soothing rejoinder, when the door opens to admit coffee and the gentlemen, and the conversation has to be commenced anew.

Music is introduced, and Clare and George Treherne, who has a beautiful tenor voice,

make great friends over the pianoforte, and sit together at the further end of the room, "flirting shamefully," as Iredell calls it, and singing ballads for each other's delectation.

Lord Burgess becomes restless. He considers Treherne is usurping the privilege he has already made by right of precedence his own—that of being walking-stick, water-dog, turner-over of music leaves, and general social factotum to Mrs. Iredell. He moves away from the sofa in the very midst of one of Lady Brodhurst's anecdotes of fashionable life, and plants himself by the side of the pianoforte. Treherne has just asked Clare to sing "Blue eyes or brown," and she is stooping to find it amongst her loose sheets of music, when the drawing-room door is flung open, and Mrs. Seymour's voice strikes upon her ear.

Clare blushes violently, and stoops still lower in a vain momentary idea of hiding herself. She knows that Addy Seymour

has run in, as she expresses it herself, "just anyhow," to rob her of the last quiet hour with her husband, and that she will be nothing abashed at finding they have company in the house.

The first words she hears her utter realise her fears.

"Holloa, Frank! Why, who would have dreamt of finding you *en grand tenue*? Here's a set out! I hope I'm not more free than welcome; but I don't think I shall run away now I'm here."

"Indeed, I hope not," says Iredell, feeling there is nothing else to say. "Clare, my dear, here is Mrs. Seymour."

"O! I'll find my way to Clare; don't trouble her. I see she's in the midst of a quiet flirtation, if not two, behind that piano, and will not thank you for disturbing her. Just take my things, Frank."

And without ceremony Mrs. Seymour disencumbers herself of hat and mantle, and

tosses them over Iredell's arm. Lady Brodhurst looks on in astonishment.

"Who is that person?" she demands in a whisper of Mrs. Treherne. Elfrida can hardly help laughing; Mrs. Seymour answers so well to the description Lady Brodhurst has just given her of the style of woman she dreaded to meet.

"*Not* a military lady," she rejoins, in the same tone, "though she possesses the worst points of one. Make your mind easy. She is no friend of Mrs. Iredell's, though she professes to be so."

By this time Clare has emerged from the shelter of the pianoforte, and held up her burning face to receive Mrs. Seymour's kiss.

"Singing, dear? How lucky! I brought my music. Go and find it for me, Charlton. It's in one of the pockets of my waterproof. Where has that goose Frank put it to? Most likely in the hall. Ask him for it."

"Sing us this ballad, Mrs. Iredell," urges Lord Burgess. "We don't want to hear any of the Seymour's screeching. I always say her voice is like a peacock's."

"That is libellous! She has a very fine voice; but I must say I don't like her style."

"Let us hear you again then, if you are not tired. I could listen for ever whilst you sing," says Lord Burgess, with a languishing look.

Clare colours, and commences her song. Mrs. Seymour crosses the room to Mrs. Treherne, and sits down beside her.

"If these naughty children had only told me they had company to-night, I would have put off my visit. However, I know I'm welcome. Is that Lady Brodhurst? Will you introduce me?"

Elfrida goes through the required ceremony; but the expression on Lady Brodhurst's face promises anything but a favourable issue to the acquaintanceship.

"I'm so glad you've made up your mind at last to come down and visit us," Mrs. Seymour says familiarly to her ladyship. "Poor dear Clare has been longing for you to see her house, and all her little possessions. I don't know really which she is proudest of—the house or the husband. They're both specimens in their way."

"I should think there was small doubt of which Mrs. Iredell thinks most," interposes Elfrida, with a frown.

"Do you? But you don't know her as well as I do. She's a splendid little housewife, and takes such a pride in keeping things nice. As for Frank, all the world knows what I think of him, dear old fellow. Ah! you needn't look surprised, Lady Brodhurst! I've known him ever since he was a child. We were brought up like brother and sister together!"

"Indeed! You must be older than you appear to be," says Lady Brodhurst, grimly.



"O! of course he was a big boy when I was a little girl; but that made no difference to our affection, I can tell you."

At this juncture Iredell re-enters the room.

"Come here, Frank!" calls out Mrs. Seymour; "I've another crow to pluck with you. Lady Brodthurst never heard a word about our old friendship till I came here this evening."

"No; and I have no desire whatever to hear about it now," replies Lady Brodthurst, rudely.

Now, a slight to a guest in his house, however unwelcome, is what Iredell's breeding could never stand without resentment.

He has been extremely annoyed by Addy Seymour's irruption on their circle that evening; but as he hears his mother-in-law's offensive remark, and notes the bright colour which dyes the younger woman's cheek, he comes forward bravely in her defence.

"There is no need whatever to tell that

of which all the world is aware, Addy. If I have not mentioned your name to Lady Brodhurst amongst those of my other old friends, it has been simply because I knew directly she paid us the honour of a visit to Woolwich she would be able to judge of our friendship for herself. How is Seymour to-night? Has he seen Bradley about that law business? I don't offer you coffee, because I know you never take it before you sing."

So talking, Iredell pushes forward the most comfortable arm-chair he can find for Mrs. Seymour, as far from Lady Brodhurst's sofa as the size of the room will permit, and throws himself into another by her side. He is wearied of the woman he dances attendance on; he is often disgusted with her; sometimes he says he *hates* her; but she has received an affront in his house, and, as far as lies in his power, now he will efface it.

Lady Brodhurst notes the *petit soins* he pays Mrs. Seymour, and fans herself violently. She says nothing, but her answers to Mrs. Treherne's well-meant endeavours to distract her attention from Colonel Iredell are made in monosyllables; and Elfrida begins to wish the hour were come for breaking up the party, and going home.

Meanwhile Treherne, guessing his wife's discomfiture from the expression of her face, leaves the piano to take a seat by her side; and Lord Burgess is left tête-à-tête with Clare.

Now Lord Burgess is not a villain to deliberately lay out his arts to seduce the affections of a married woman away from her lawful lord; very few men are. The pitfalls into which people occasionally tumble in this world are oftener led up to through the paths of misfortune or misadventure, than by those of crime. Im-

prudence, thoughtlessness, vanity, love of pleasure, and hatred of self-denial—these are far more formidable foes for human nature to contend against than open, undisguised vice.

Lord Burgess is young, good-looking, and rich. He has been very much used to have the ball of fortune at his feet, especially with regard to women. He considers Clare Iredell to be the most engaging, attractive, and interesting girl that he has met for a long time; and he would like her to think him attractive and interesting too. He believes it no harm to admire a pretty woman, married or single, still less to let her know of his admiration. This is the extent of his reflection, if he reflects upon it at all. But, for the present, all that he has really decided in his own mind is, that "Mrs. Iredell is deuced pretty, and deuced nice."

Clare, on the contrary, is a little fluttered

by his lordship's evident admiration. It would be too much perhaps to say she is alarmed at it, but she would certainly rather not be left alone with him, particularly when he leans with both arms over the grand piano, and looks her full in the face as she is singing.

She gets through "Blue eyes or brown" in a rather hurried and tremulous manner, which is foreign to her usual well-bred coolness, but Mrs. Seymour's entrance has disturbed her, and she is longing to get away from Lord Burgess and to hear all that is going on at the other end of the room. She is thinking of anything but the meaning of her song as she concludes the second verse, and is startled by her companion observing—

"Well! I don't know what the fellow who wrote those words can have been about not to know whether he liked blue eyes or brown eyes the best. I can't imagine any-

one having a choice in the matter myself. He must have been very much divided in his affections."

"Perhaps *she* had one brown eye and one blue," says Clare, merrily, as she puts her music on one side.

"O! by Jove! Mrs. Iredell, you're too cutting! Fancy a woman with eyes of different colours! Though if they were anything like yours, one of them would be enough to do the work for me."

Clare is not sure at first that she has heard aright. Her beautiful violet eyes turn upon Lord Burgess in grave astonishment. But then, reading in the expression of his own far more than he would dare to say, she flushes deeply over brow and bosom, and turns hastily away.

She has never had an open compliment paid her since her marriage by any man except her husband, and she feels it as an insult. She is not old enough nor hardened

enough in the world's ways to make Lord Burgess believe that his allusion has passed unnoticed, or covertly to rebuke him for its impertinence. She is such a girl still, that she lets him see by her blushing that it has affected her, and then there seems nothing left but to get away from him as fast as she can. She makes a sudden rush from the piano to her husband's side. There is no chair near at hand, but she half seats herself on the arm of his, and looks down upon him, glowing with excitement. Iredell is in the midst of his conciliatory conversation with Mrs. Seymour, and as Clare reaches him she hears him say—

“You will never find me backward to take your part, Addy. I consider the remark as ill-bred as you do.”

Iredell loves his wife, as we know, to distraction, but he does not want her there just then. Her sudden raid upon him and Mrs. Seymour looks as if she were carrying

out her mother's estimate of them, and suspicious of what they may be saying. He hates anything like love-making in public also, especially before his brother officers, and the position Clare has taken up alarms him. She is such a terrible child. She may kiss him next, or do something equally awful. So he gently urges her off the perch she has assumed with an inclination of the elbow.

"Go and sit near your mother, my dear," he says in a low voice. "I don't want you here just now." And Clare, a little disappointed and a little hurt, does as he tells her, and takes a seat on the sofa between Lady Brodhurst and Mrs. Treherne.

"I thought we were to have some singing from Mrs. Seymour," remarks Elfrida.

"The lady seems much more agreeably employed," says Lady Brodhurst, sarcastically, as Mrs. Seymour's affected giggle becomes apparent in the small room.



Clare glances towards Iredell, and sees that he is whispering something in Addy's ear, at which she is laughing immoderately.

"They're keeping all the fun to themselves over there," says Treherne, good humouredly, to the group on the sofa.

"Yes; but George, dear, don't you think it's time for home?" replies Elfrida.

"Just as you please, my darling."

"I think by far the best thing we can do is to break up *at once*," remarks Lady Brodhurst, significantly.

"Let me set the example then," says Elfrida, rising. "Good night, Lady Brodhurst; good night, Mrs. Iredell, we shall meet again, I hope, before long."

"O, you mustn't go yet!" exclaims Iredell, as he rises and comes towards them. "Here, Treherne, man, what are you about? Make your wife sit down again. The evening's only half begun."

"My dear fellow, it's getting late; we really must go."

"You shan't do any such thing."

George and Elfrida laugh, but Lady Brodhurst rises from the sofa in awful dignity—

"At all events, Colonel Iredell, you will permit *me* to retire to my own apartment," she says, and with a bow to the Trehernes, Lord Burgess, and Mr. Charlton, and never a glance in the direction of Mrs. Seymour, she sails out of the drawing-room like an offended monarch.

"Halloa!" cries Iredell, with a comical expression on his face like that of a detected schoolboy, who knows his whipping will follow.

"Frank, dear, *don't*," pleads Clare, in fear lest he should be overheard.

But though everybody laughs, Addy Seymour included, no one is really amused; and a general dispersion follows Lady Brodhurst's departure.

"Clare, my pet! what's up now?" inquires Iredell, as he sits down somewhat ruefully to his solitary pipe.

"I don't know. I suppose mamma took offence at something about Mrs. Seymour. Frank, I don't like Lord Burgess."

"Not like Burgess, Clare? O! you must. He's one of the best fellows in the corps."

"Who's this?"

Collins puts her head in at the door.

"If you please, Miss Clare, will you come in and speak to her ladyship before you go to bed?"

"I will come at once."

"And leave me to smoke all alone," says Iredell, plaintively.

"Go and smoke in our own room, dearest. I shall not be long. I am too tired."

"Smoking in your bedroom, Clare? What will her ladyship *not* say! Insult! indignity! murder! rapine! death!"

"Frank! it is *our* room," says the girl, wistfully.

"I know that, pet."

"No one dares to enter it but ourselves! No one dares to question our actions or our words! No one shall ever dare to come between our hearts—shall they, Frank?"

"My darling! of course not. Why these tears?"

"Because I cannot bear that anyone should even imagine we have a thought or wish that is not in common. Go up and smoke in our bedroom, Frank. Do! It seems to make it more especially our own."

END OF VOL. I.

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